

# Sermon Outline

“ABBA! FATHER!”:  
KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

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## YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON (LUKE 3:21, 22)

### I. Introduction

### II. John

- A. Around 28 AD, a preacher named John begins announcing that the long-awaited Kingdom of God is finally at hand.
- B. To prepare people for the arrival of God’s Kingdom, John conducts a ministry of *baptism*.
- C. One day, John’s cousin *Jesus* comes to be baptized by John.
- D. John tries to prevent Jesus from coming for baptism because John knew who Jesus was: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Mt 3:14)
- E. Instead of agreeing with John, Jesus’ response is fascinating: “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15).
  1. Jesus submitted himself to baptism not because he himself needed it, for he was sinless; but because he himself was an *Israelite*.
  2. Jesus stood in solidarity with his fellow Israelites to seek the righteousness of God.
- F. But Jesus also underwent baptism because he was the long-awaited King of Israel.
  1. As the King of his people (as any other king in those days), Jesus embodies in himself the destiny of his people, his nation, both Jew and Gentile.
  2. As the Lord Jesus himself steps into the waters of the Jordan and undergoes baptism, he was not just doing this for himself. He was doing it for all those who would one day belong to him.
  3. Here at long last is the Israelite and human being that God is seeking. Here at long last is the man who will answer God’s call to be a light to the world, to be holy as God is holy—and who will fulfill that vow to its fullest.
  4. Thus, Jesus entered the waters of baptism for you and for me.
- G. In fact, this is the underlying assumption that Martin Luther encourages us to take with us when we read the Gospels:

Be sure, moreover, that you do not make Christ into a Moses, as if Christ did nothing more than teach and provide examples as the other saints do, as if the gospel were simply a textbook of teachings or laws. Therefore, you should grasp Christ, His words, works, and sufferings in a twofold manner. First, as an example that is presented to you, which you should follow and imitate.... Thus when you see how He prays, fasts, helps people and shows them love, so also you should do, both for yourself and for your neighbor. However, this is the smallest part of the gospel, on the basis of which it cannot yet even be called gospel. For on this level Christ is of no more help to you than some other saint. His life remains His own and does not as yet contribute anything to you. In short, this mode [of understanding Christ as simply an example] does not make Christians, but only hypocrites. You must grasp Christ at a much higher level. Even though this higher level has for a long

time been the very best, the preaching of it has been something rare. The chief article and foundation of the gospel is that before you take Christ as an example, you accept and recognize Him as a gift, as a present that God has given you and that is your own. This means that when you see or hear of Christ doing or suffering something, you do not doubt that Christ Himself, with His deeds and suffering, belongs to you. On this you may depend as surely as if you had done it yourself; indeed as if you were Christ Himself (“A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels” in *Faith and Freedom: An Invitation to the Writings of Martin Luther*, ed., John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne 71).

1. Basically, Luther is teaching us that when we read the Gospels, we are not to simply look at Jesus as a Good Teacher or Good Example.
2. Before we even read Jesus as a Teacher and try to obey his instructions, we must first see that Jesus lived, taught, and acted on our behalf.  
—*All that Jesus said and did was to fulfill the righteousness that you and I lack, and also to compensate God for all the offenses that you and I have committed.*
3. As Jesus steps into the waters, we see ourselves in Jesus turning from sin and devoting ourselves to God in total allegiance.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Martin Luther advise us to read the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels? (2) How are we to understand the baptism of Jesus in relation to ourselves?

### III. Jesus and Repentant Sinners (Luke 3:21)

- A. After the Lord Jesus rises from the waters, verse 21 reads: “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened...”
- B. From this verse, we see that *Jesus was together with repentant sinners*.
  1. This emphasizes the solidarity Jesus shares with us sinners.
  2. all the people with whom Jesus was baptized that day—with the exception of Jesus himself—were sinners who believed that God himself was about to visit his people in great power and that they had better get ready.
  3. Little did they know that God himself was among them.
  4. God in the person of Jesus was submitting himself to baptism.
  5. God in Jesus is answering his own call for holiness and fulfilling for his people what they are unable to do for themselves because of sin.
  6. God—the same God who rebuked Israel through his prophet saying “I have no pleasure in you” (Mal 1:10)—was baptized on that day in the rivers of the Jordan in the person of his Son Jesus Christ.
  7. God in Jesus stood shoulder-to-shoulder in solidarity with sinful men and women.
- C. If we recognize that God himself has now entered the scene to save his people, our perspective of the past changes.
  1. When Israel asked God, “How have you loved us?” (Mal 1:2) God is now answering that question in a fresh new way.
  2. God now says he loves us not simply by choosing us for salvation.
  3. God loves us by entering our world, sharing our griefs and burdens, and finally, taking our sins upon himself on the cross.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What kinds of people were with Jesus when he was baptized? (2) How does God's arrival in Jesus answer Israel's question: "How have you loved us?" in Mal 1:2?

#### IV. Jesus Prayed (Luke 3:21)

- A. From Luke 3:21, we also see that after his baptism, *Jesus prayed*.
- B. At first, this might be one of those details that we think we can brush aside.
- C. But God does not simply drop words in Scripture for nothing.
- D. The fact that Jesus was praying after his baptism points us to his life-long communion with God.
  - 1. It shows the solidity of Jesus' commitment to God
  - 2. Prayer is the means by which we seek God and commune with him. But there is also more.
- E. Since Jesus was the *King* of God's people, what Jesus did here was also for us, in our place.
- F. By his prayerful life, now and always, Jesus answers for our prayerlessness.
- G. Jesus the Son of God, Jesus who is God the Son, prays and seeks God on our behalf.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What did Jesus do after he was baptized? (2) What is the significance of Jesus' praying after baptism?

#### V. The Heavens Opened (Luke 3:21)

- A. When Jesus was praying, "*the heavens were opened*."
- B. This phrase associated with visions of heaven (see also Isa 64:1; Acts 7:56).
  - 1. In Ezekiel 1:1, the prophet Ezekiel talks about how the visions of God came to him: "In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God."
- C. Like Ezekiel before, the Lord Jesus is granted a vision of heaven, the invisible realm of God, the place of the eternal glory of God.
- D. With the arrival of God's own Son, Jesus, the heavens are opened once again. —God speaks with man through the new prophet he has chosen: *Jesus Messiah*.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the phrase "the heavens were opened" mean? (2) Why is the opening of heaven for Jesus such an auspicious occasion?

#### VI. The Holy Spirit Is Given to Jesus (Luke 3:22)

- A. As the heavens opened, the Lord God sends his Holy Spirit, his holy Presence, upon the praying Jesus: "and the Holy Spirit descended on him..." (v 22).
- B. The Holy Spirit assumed a bodily form when he descended upon Jesus: The Holy Spirit took the form of a dove, or "like a dove," as the Scripture says.
  - 1. The other synoptic Gospels talk about this.
    - a. Matthew 3:16: "he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him [.]"

- b. Mark 1:10: “And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.”
2. Each of the three Synoptic Gospels reports that the Holy Spirit assumed the physical appearance of a dove when he was sent on the Lord Jesus.
- C. Jesus is now empowered by the Spirit of God to do the good works God has assigned him.
  - Like the Israelite kings and priests of old, Jesus is now being *anointed* to begin his royal service to God and to God’s people.
- D. Why a dove?
  1. The Holy Spirit can certainly take whatever form he wishes.
    - a. The Holy Spirit is associated with *fire*.
      - i. Luke 3:16: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”
      - ii. Acts 2:3: The Holy Spirit descends in the form of fire upon the disciples.
    - b. The Holy Spirit is associated with *wind*.
      - i. The Hebrew word for “spirit,” *ruach*, can also mean wind, breath, or air.
      - ii. The Holy Spirit is the rushing breath of the almighty Lord.
  2. Given all these symbols of the Holy Spirit—fire and wind—why does the Holy Spirit now take the form of a dove?
    - a. The Holy Spirit takes the form of a dove likely because the dove is a symbol of hope and good news.
    - b. In Genesis 8:11, a dove signaled to Noah that the flood waters had subsided.
    - c. Good news characterizes the ministry of Jesus.
    - d. While the Lord Jesus will one day purify creation with God’s holy fire, that is not the role he plays at this moment in time.
    - e. At this moment, Jesus comes as the Savior of the world, as the One who reconciles mankind to God.
    - f. By sending the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, God is saying something about the work that he has sent Jesus to do.
    - g. Through Jesus, God has come to restore the broken relationship between mankind and himself—and signal the end of judgment.
- E. Since we were represented in Jesus that day, we have another way of looking at this event.
  1. As Jesus receives the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, God affirms to all who belong to Jesus that he is gently and peacefully disposed toward them.
  2. We do not experience the Holy Spirit primarily as the harsh fire of judgment but the Holy Spirit as an empowering Friend and Helper (Jn 14:26), as God’s most precious gift to us.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Who descends upon the Lord Jesus? (2) What form does the Holy Spirit take and why is this significant? (3) How do we experience the Holy Spirit through Jesus?

## VII. “You Are My Beloved Son” (Luke 3:22)

- A. When the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus, “a voice came from heaven...”
- B. The voice says, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”
- C. Contrast those words of affirmation with the words of rebuke God spoke to his rebellious priests in Malachi 1:10: “I have no pleasure in you.”

- D. Here is a faithful priest, a faithful Son who pleases God in all that he does.
- E. The good news is that this faithful Son, Jesus, carries us in himself.
  - 1. When he obeyed God, God considers that we too have obeyed him in Jesus Christ.
  - 2. When he received the endorsement of God, the affirmation of God, we too received the Father's affirmation in him.
- F. This concept of our representation in Christ is very important because it is a key part of the Gospel.
  - 1. If we are not represented in Christ...
    - a. all the good things that Christ did would be of no use to us.
    - b. all the good things that happened to Christ would be of no use to us.
    - c. we would have no hope of sharing in God's affirmation of Jesus: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."
  - 2. While it seems far easier to simply take Christ as a good example for us, doing so would simply revert us to the same Law that condemns us to death—for Christ Jesus obeyed the Law of God.
  - 3. Thus, for Christ to have any benefit for us, we must go one step further—and put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - 4. Having put our faith in Christ, we must see that *everything that Christ did, Christ did for us and in our place. Everything that Christ received, Christ received for us.*
  - 5. That is the internal, underlying logic of the Gospel. That is what makes the entire life of our Lord Jesus good news to us.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does God say to Jesus? (2) What must we do to benefit from God's words to Christ? (3) "Everything that Christ did, Christ did for us and in our place." Discuss how this changes your perception of Jesus' life as presented in the Gospels.

### **VIII. God Affirms Us in Jesus Christ**

**From Malachi 1, we learned that we experience God as our Father by obeying God in all things, by not cheating God of the love and obedience that we owe him. But from Luke 3, we learn that we must add two important words to that statement—"in Christ." We experience God as our heavenly Father by devoting our lives to God in the Lord Jesus Christ; and then from there, receiving our affirmation from God also in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, whatever experience we have of God's fatherly love comes through our Lord Jesus Christ the beloved Son of God. This is why the Lord Jesus says in John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And this is also why the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." The only way that we can gain the approval of our heavenly Father is through Jesus Christ the beloved Son of God.**

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How are we to know the fatherly love of God? (2) "The only way that we can gain the approval of our heavenly Father is through Jesus Christ the beloved Son of God." Discuss.

## IX. Offended by the Beloved Son?

- A. But some people may take *offense* at this truth that we receive God's affirmation only in Christ.
- B. If we gain God's approval only in Jesus Christ, then basically every religious system that we have set up to somehow gain God's final approval is called into question.
- C. In fact, going even further, every secular system that we have set up to strengthen our deepest self-identity is also called into question.
- D. If Jesus is where we hear the Father's approval, we don't have to use anything else to gain our ultimate self-confidence.  
—We don't have to pretend to be better people than we really are.
- E. The way our culture seems to grade human beings based primarily on their salaries, education, and occasionally, personal connections, is called into question both by the rebuke of God on sinners and praise of God for Jesus alone.
- F. If (1) God thinks that even our best works are stained with sin; and (2) Jesus is the only place where we receive God's approval, those ways by which we seek final approval must be shown for what they are—they are simply forms of self-affirmation.
- G. The good news of Jesus as God's supremely beloved Son cuts down every system of human pride and reduces it to nothing.

**\*Questions for reflection:** Why would this truth—that Jesus is where God's affirmation is found—be offensive to some? Is it offensive to you at some level?

## X. Comforted in the Beloved Son

- A. When we come to the Son, God begins to rebuild us.
- B. The next thing that God's words to Jesus do for us is that they *comfort* us.
- C. God's Words restore peace and quiet into the core of our beings.
  - 1. They say to us that even though we are still sinful, God no longer holds our sins against us.
  - 2. In fact, God no longer sees us primarily as sinners.
  - 3. Instead, God sees us primarily as his beloved children in Jesus Christ.
  - 4. In Jesus Christ, we are at peace with God, even though we are still sinful.
  - 5. In Jesus Christ, we are righteous before God; even if we are still unrighteous in ourselves.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How are we comforted by God's Words to Jesus? (2) How does God see us in Jesus Christ? (3) How is it possible for us to be righteous and unrighteous at the same time?

## XI. Encouraged in the Beloved Son

- A. The words that God spoke to Christ *encourage* us to continue serving God.
- B. If we have tender consciences, nothing discourages us from serving God more than his disapproval.
- C. At the same time, nothing is more encouraging than to know that God heartily approves of us.
- D. If we have trusted in Christ, God has given us his hearty approval.

- E. Because of this great love, we are now free to serve God for the sake of God and for the sake of our neighbors.
- F. We don't have to do good deeds to build up our own egos.

**\*Questions for reflection:** What encouragement does our affirmation in Christ give us? How or why does God's encouragement free us to do good?

## **XII. Our Journey in the Beloved Son**

- A. Finally, along with comfort and encouragement, the words that God spoke to Christ—"You are my beloved Son"—strengthen us for our journey with the Son of God.
- B. We need this strength, because God will send us back into the wilderness of the world to battle with our spiritual enemies.
- C. Where does Jesus go after he was encouraged by the Word of God? Where does God send Jesus right after this event? He sends him into the wilderness to confront Satan and then back into the world for service.
- D. If we are in Jesus, we can expect similar kinds of moments in our lives.
  1. After God has declared us his beloved sons and daughters in Jesus, he sends us on our way with Jesus.
  2. With Jesus, we go into the wilderness of the world to confront Satan and his powers.
  3. With Jesus, we go to the cities to preach the Gospel and free captives.
  4. With Jesus, we carry our various crosses and suffer the rejection of the world and the assaults of the evil one (Phil 3:10; 2 Tim 2:3).
  5. With Jesus, we too will rise from the dead and ascend in glory.
- E. As our heavenly Father guides us into such works, we will begin to see that we really are his beloved children, because our Father guided our Lord Jesus Christ into such works too.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Now that we are in Christ, where is God taking us? How does Christ's own experience after his baptism provide a clue as to where God will take us after he declares us his own? (2) How does this encourage you in your own struggles against sin and persecution today?