

Strong In Spirit

Our study today continues in the Book of Luke, chapter 2. And as Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus return to Nazareth, much has taken place within this little family since they journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the census, a lot of strange and wonderful things.

The Baby Jesus has been born there in that stable in Bethlehem. The Holy angels have come to declare His presence to the shepherds in the fields. And the shepherds have visited and worshipped this Newborn King of all creation.

Then, after the appropriate number of days had passed since the baby was born, and in keeping with the commandments of the Jewish law, Mary and Joseph, brought the Baby Jesus to the temple for the necessary circumcision and then again later to present the offerings required under the Mosaic law.

And on that occasion, while they were there in the temple, you will recall that they encountered two very special people, Simeon and Anna, who praised and worshipped the Baby Jesus, declaring Him to be the King of Glory, the Messiah that God had long promised to send to redeem His people, Israel.

And though earlier the Angel of the Lord had told Mary and Joseph much about this very special Baby that Mary had borne, they still were not able to fully comprehend these events that were taking place. It is said here that they “marveled” as each of these things took place, Mary treasuring up all these things and pondering them in her heart.

And then, after these things, we find that Mary and Joseph simply returned home and got about their daily lives, raising this new blessed and mysterious child that God had brought to them. Listen, beginning in verse 39!

³⁹So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. ⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:39-40)

These words are so very simple, but I must confess to you that they are also some of the most difficult and profound for me to comprehend, especially verse 40,

⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:40)

Why would these words be so difficult for me to comprehend? It is because, after having studied these scriptures for so many years now, I know that while these words are telling us about this little baby, they are also speaking about the all-knowing and omnipotent God of the universe, the very one who had, in the beginning of time, actually created everything that exists, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, and even the very ground that this baby Jesus Himself would later walk on.

And yet, here in these words it is being implied that He is weak and in need of growing in strength and wisdom and in need of help from the grace of God. Listen again!

⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:40)

It would seem that these words would more aptly be used to describe the growth that would take place within an ordinary child, like you and me, and not within the very God of all creation.

For that reason, you and I must understand that we are being invited by these words to dig deeper and to ask the Lord, "How can this be, and what exactly do you mean with these words?"

⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:40)

Let me suggest that there is a "divine secret" being whispered to us from the very mouth of God, a divine secret that says to us that there is so much more residing within this Child, this Person, the Lord Jesus, than we could ever imagine. He is, as these scriptures tell us, both the "Son of God" and also, the "Son of Man", a mysterious combination, but one that God wants us to know more about.

There is a human heart and mind and soul residing within His fleshly body, yes. But there is also another, more unique and wonderful and eternal being residing there. God Himself. The Almighty and Omnipotent God of all the earth is also present within the heart, soul, mind and body of Jesus, and has been there even from the first moment of His conception.

As Christians, you and I have read these words over and over again, and we have been taught them in our Sunday school classes and in bible studies. They are so familiar, and we often say with great conviction that we believe them.

But folks, let me remind us, truths such as these cannot be fully comprehended merely through our study and reflection, no matter how diligent we are in our efforts. Something else, something far stronger than intellectual thought, must be present before we can truly begin to grasp the deeper truths of these words.

These words are some of those “secrets of the kingdom” spoken about in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, truths that God only reveals to those who truly love Him. Listen again to those words from 1 Corinthians 2, words that I have read to you often.

⁹ . . . as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” ¹⁰but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

. . . ¹³This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. (1 Corinthians 2:9-13)

The mysterious wisdom of God is veiled from most all ordinary human understanding. But, as we read in these words, it is freely revealed to us by God's Holy Spirit. And it only has one requirement from you and me, “that we love Him”. And folks, I want God to reveal more of His “spiritual wisdom” to you and me today, some of those “Spiritual secrets” about the Lord Jesus that explain to our weak understanding how He can be the “Son of God” and the “Son of Man”, both at the same time.

And those “Spiritual secrets” can begin to be seen within these words that tell us about a concurrence, both “of being”, and “of events”, a unique union that resided within the heart, soul, spirit, mind and body of Jesus. It was a union like no other union that will ever exist within another human being, a union that would cause a “Son of man” to be and to live a daily life in perfect concurrence with the “Will of God”. Again, consider these words of verse 40,

⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:40)

A question that arises, "But why was all of this necessary, for the very God who created everything that exists, to come and to join together with the flesh of common man?"

That is a question that many theologians have wrestled with for many centuries. And I personally don't know all that needs to be known about it. But one answer that God has given to me is a simple one. Jesus, as the omnipotent Son of God could not die for our sins. He is eternal, without beginning and without end. But Jesus the "Son of man" could die. And that became God's plan in the birth, the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And praise be to God, Jesus was faithful to complete His part of the plan.

Folks, it seems that for us who are too often prone to question all these things with "doubts abounding" within our minds, the greatest obstacle that we have to overcome is the simple acceptance through faith that Jesus really is all that He is said to be within these scriptures. He truly is the "Son of man" and also, at the same time, the "Son of God".

Once we have done that, once we have by faith, freely accepted these truths about the Lord Jesus, we can then begin to consider questions such as these, without doubting. Questions like, "If Jesus truly is Almighty God, then why, as a man, would He need to "become strong in spirit", and "filled with wisdom"? As God, is He not already strong in spirit and filled with wisdom? Did He not bring all of those attributes with Him from heaven as He came to inhabit the body of this little child?

And again, praise be to God, questions such as, "Is Jesus truly the omnipotent God of the universe?" are answered clearly and directly within these scriptures, scriptures such as Hebrews chapter 1. Listen to those words!

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Yes, this "Son of man" and "Son of God", the Lord Jesus was from all time and eternity the omnipotent God of the universe. Jesus was and is the "express

image" of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, all combined into One.

And listen to how one commentator, R. C. Sproul, explains this mysterious oneness that exists within the Person of God. He tells us,

that three distinct persons are the one divine nature in its entirety. The Father possesses all that makes God who He is; the Son possesses all that makes God who He is; and the Spirit possesses all that makes God who He is. We do not worship three gods, each of whom has his own power, his own intelligence, and so on. Instead, we worship three persons who hold in common the same power, the same intelligence, and the same essence.

And so, as we study through these scriptures, we find that even beginning here within the Person of this small Baby, resided all of the essence and being of the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God over all things.

And so, as we consider the question that we began to consider a moment ago, "If Jesus truly is the Almighty God, then why, as a child, and then as a man, would He need to "become strong in spirit", and "filled with wisdom"? As God, is He not already strong in spirit and filled with wisdom? Did He not bring all of those things with Him from heaven as He came to inhabit the body of this little child?

Folks, I must confess that, for me, these are questions that might remain a mystery while I am still in this flesh. Because, while yes, as the "Son of God", Jesus could have brought all of the attributes of God with Him into His birth and His life here in His human form, but it seems that to be a true "Son of man", it was best that He did not.

And again, while these truly are mysterious questions, I believe that God nonetheless wants you and me to try to understand them as best we can. And so, for today, we will ask for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to help us to know what He wants us to know.

And so, may we repeat some of the things we have been saying this morning and ask the question again, "Could Jesus not have brought His power and His majesty with Him into this Human life? One part of that answer is, "No, because were he to have done that, He would not have been able to be tempted even

as we are. And He would not have been able to suffer the sufferings of men and then die on the cross as our substitute to save us from our sins.

We read in Philippians 2,

⁵ . . . Christ Jesus, ⁶who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

And in Hebrews 4, verse 15

¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Yes, Jesus was truly the omnipotent God of all creation, but somehow, and we don't know how He did it, He willingly laid aside His power, His glory and His majesty in heaven to come and live among us, becoming like us in order that He might fully suffer all of the sufferings of mankind, yet without sin. But to do that, He really did need to be born of woman, born under the same law, and the same conditions, that all other men and women are born under.

And so, Jesus came to us as a weak and frail child, the "Son of God", yes, but within the heart, soul, mind and body of a "Son of Man".

Recall again also, that when the angel Gabriel first spoke to Mary about Jesus, he said,

³¹ . . . behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest. (Luke 1:31)

Here in these words, the angel is telling Mary that her son Jesus would not only be her son, completely and fully human, but He would also be Son of the Most High God, making Him both "Son of Man" and "Son of God".

Another question, "Why is Jesus presented to us as the "Son of God" when, in fact, He is God Himself and is said in Isaiah chapter 9 to be the "Everlasting Father"? Listen to those words in Isaiah 9:6,

⁶ For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Jesus existed in heaven from all eons past, as “one” and “coequal with” God the Father and God the Spirit. But for Jesus to become the Messiah, and able to be the sacrificed Lamb who would take away the sins of the world, it was necessary for Him to be “begat” into His human form as “Son of man”.

But again, the question, “Why would God even want to do such a thing to begin with, to become united with mankind within a human body?

The reason is that God needed to remedy the problem of mankind at its very source. Sin had its origin within the hearts of men and women, so there is where God would need to go to remedy that problem.

But our problem is not an easy problem to fix! It's not as if God could simply “wave His hand” and make all of our sins go away. God's holiness is pure and not such that He can be so permissive with sin.

Sin is so utterly wrong and so much in violation of God's holiness that it cannot be simply “swept under the carpet and forgotten about” for all eternity.

God's holiness demands that there be not even the tiniest particle of a sin left remaining within us. It needs to be “justified”, wiped away just as if it had never taken place to begin with. And that can only be done by paying for the debt that sin incurs in full.

As with your and my common debt, if payment is given in full by us, then our creditor has no further claim against us. And the same is true with our sin. If our sin is paid for in full, then the “law” has no further claim against us.

But, as you and I know, we cannot pay that kind of penalty for our sins, because the penalty for sin is death, eternal death in the pit of hell. And if we pay that penalty, we will perish forever.

So, in order that we might have life eternal, God came to earth, in human form, to live, to grow and then to die, our death, for our sin and to wipe it all away.

No, this solution that God provided is not a simple one, and it does not make the best of sense to us, but that is because we cannot truly fathom the holiness of God. Sin is too sinful, and God's holiness is too demanding for us to ever fully comprehend it. But by faith we can rest in the knowledge that His way was truly the only way to satisfy our debt for sin. And praise the Lord, Jesus did that!

And so, as we try to comprehend these words,

⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:40)

We might not at this point be able to fully understand it all, but we do know why it was necessary for Jesus to be a "man", the "Son of Man".

It was necessary so that Jesus could be like you and me, suffer the kind of sufferings that we suffer daily, be tempted just as we are tempted, grow in spirit and wisdom and in obedience to His earthly parents and to God His Father, and then die on the cross, wiping away the debt for all our sins, so that we might have eternal life. It could not have taken place any other way.

Yes, He was God, but to cleanse us from our sin, He had to become a "Son of Man".

Listen again, as we close.

⁴⁰And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:40)