

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan, Jr.

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 1:1-10, 22-28

Sermon Title: "Son of God and Son of Man" (Second Sunday of Advent)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

December 9, 2012

We can say that Jesus has many titles. We know him as Savior and Lord, Messiah and Word. We also know Jesus as the Son of God. Son of God might be one of the first titles we attach to Jesus, when speaking of him. Yet what are we talking about, when we say that Jesus was and is the *Son of God*? What are we really saying about Jesus?

The Son part might be easy for us to understand. When it comes to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, we know that he was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Mother Mary, betrothed to Joseph, was overcome by the Spirit, and was told that she would bear a son and call him Jesus, which means He Saves.¹ Mary may have been the earthly mother of Jesus, but later in his ministry Jesus does call himself the Son, comparing himself to God the Father. "I and the Father are one... I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because

¹ Cf. Matthew 1:18, 21

whatever the Father does the Son also does.²

Jesus points to the deep connection he has with God the Father. They are not co-gods existing together. They aren't even partners or companions. The title of Son and Father gives us the sense that God and Jesus are family, but even then the connection runs much deeper than that. I guess the Lord gives us this illustration of family, so we might understand as best as we can their relationship. Love and grace flow freely and constantly within families, or at least should flow that way. Families support one another, share pains and struggles together, celebrate special occasions together. All that goes on in a family goes on between the Father and Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Son has perfect love and grace with the Father and the Spirit. There is perfect support and perfect sharing. And yet, the relationship that Jesus speaks of runs so much deeper than we can ever describe. There is an absolute intimacy that we could only imagine having on earth. Jesus gives us this idea of family when he speaks of his Father, and we can only pray that we would experience a portion of that "family-sense" with God and others.

Jesus' title is the Son of God. Throughout his

² John 10:30 and 5:19, respectively.

ministry, people would say, “Isn’t this the son of Joseph? Isn’t Mary his mother? Isn’t he just a carpenter? How does this man do such great things, since we already know about his family?”³ Jesus is more than the son of two earthly parents. He is the Son of God.

We may go back to the story of Bethlehem, and say that this is undeniable evidence that proves Jesus is the Son of God. The Holy Spirit came to Mary, and helped to conceive the Child. Since the Holy Spirit is God, Jesus is of God, and is God’s Son. That’s logical enough. But the meaning behind the title *Son of God* doesn’t start with a conception in Nazareth and stop nine months later with a birth in Bethlehem.

The title of Son of God is one of majesty. Mary first witnessed his majesty at his birth, when she observed her Babe and pondered many profound spiritual matters in her heart. The shepherds saw his majesty, when they came running from the fields to talk about angels coming to visit them and singing, “Glory to God in highest and on earth peace and goodwill to all.” Majesty was observed, when the wise men came to the Babe, and one of them offered the gift of gold, the prized possession of a king.

Majesty was observed by the way Jesus spoke with

³ Cf. Matthew 13:55-56 and Mark 6:3.

people. Crowds were amazed by what he said, because he taught with an authority that not even the teachers of the law had.⁴ He gave commands to the people like they had never heard before. He “claimed to be one with God by daring to put his own [instruction] on the same level with Scripture. ‘You have heard it said... But *I* say to you (Matthew 5:21ff. See also Matthew 7:28). Moreover, he backed up his words with actions. He performed miracles of healing and forgave sins (Mark 2:5-12).”⁵ Nobody forgives sins, unless you are God. Unless you are the Son of God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

People got it. They saw it all. They knew they stood in the presence of majesty. When Jesus spoke of himself, and then did things for people that satisfied their longings, there could be no mistake that Jesus was from God. He was God, the Son of God in all power, in all majesty, in all holiness, and all in for us.

When we address the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, what naturally follows is the title the Son of Man. In fact, when we call Jesus the Son of God, we may automatically say *Son of Man*. Again, do we know what we are saying? Why call Jesus both the Son of

⁴ Cf. Matthew 7:28-29, Mark 1:22, and Luke 4:32.

⁵ Shirley C. Guthrie Jr., *Christian Doctrine*, 237.

God Almighty and of all of us?

I picked up this wonderful thought from Shirley C. Guthrie. He was a professor of theology from Columbia Theological Seminary, up in Decatur. He was also a Presbyterian minister. In his book *Christian Doctrine*, Guthrie talks about Jesus as the Son of God, but then he discusses the humanity of God. We believe as Christians that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit to a virgin called Mary. We believe that the Word is God, and that the Word took on flesh. Guthrie says, in Jesus Christ God himself is with us. “God stoops to identify himself with the cause of [human beings – our struggles, our pains, our hopes and dreams, our worries and wants.]”⁶ God identifies with us by becoming a human being, perfect in every way. This is where he gets the title Son of Man.

Guthrie then goes into a discussion about the exaltation of humans and the humiliation of God. These thoughts join together under the title of Son of Man. “God did not make himself known to us as an angel or a superhuman spirit.” The angels as heavenly beings came to the shepherds in the fields, but they only announced the birth of a Babe, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. God didn’t come to the shepherds as

⁶ Ibid., 239.

an angel, nor as a superhuman being who swooped down from the sky wearing a red and blue suit and cape. God stooped down to our level as a human being in order to show us what life is about. By doing so, God placed his divine stamp of approval on all human beings. Ever since the first Christmas day, God the Father through Christ strives to renew us, restoring flesh and blood to the state of wholeness and holiness, just as God is whole and holy.

I remember a youth director once describing an anthill that was in danger of getting swept away from a rising river. The anthill would be taken down stream. Thousands of ants would die. If we had any feelings for those ants, we might try to move them to a different spots. But they wouldn't like that, would they? They would swarm in droves, and bite our hands, and do everything they could to stay on their anthill, despite what danger was coming. So, my youth director said, in order to communicate the danger to those ants, we would have to become ant, right? We could have to be like one of them, and communicate the threat in their own language. Maybe if we were one of them, they might listen and run for high ground.

It is an interesting illustration, but I think this point stands: Christ, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to take for

granted, but Christ made himself nothing, taking on the flesh and shape of a human being. Being a human, he humbled himself to the will of God the Father, even becoming obedient to death.⁷

This is what Guthrie calls the exaltation of humans and the humiliation of God. God stoops, God becomes humble, and God submits, all for our sake.

“Christmas means that unlike the false gods,... the true God can accomplish his will in weakness as well as in strength, by sacrificing himself as well as by asserting himself, in the non-religious as well as the religious sphere.”⁸ Even though it is called the humiliation of God, God never compromised his goodness and holiness by being born and living with us. He displayed the full extent of his goodness and holiness by becoming a Babe.

So Jesus may be called the Son of Man, the most perfect person ever to live, because he was one of us. He is our Stamp of Approval, our Representative, the Man in whom we find our mountain summit and our completeness.⁹

The Son of God/Son of Man “has appeared, and has seated himself on the throne of his glory, and all

⁷ Cf. Philippians 2:5-8.

⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 239-240.

⁹ William Barclay, *Jesus As They Saw Him*, cf. 70.

evil shall pass away before his face, and the word of that [Son] shall go forth and be strong...”¹⁰ “If you want to know what it means to be a human being... look at Jesus Christ [Son of Man]. If you want to know God – Look at Jesus Christ [Son of God].”¹¹ We confess him every week, we worship him every day. He is our Immanuel, God always and forever with us.

¹⁰ Ibid, 82.

¹¹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 240.