



We've been looking at the big story of the Bible and we come today to the very beginning of Jesus's public ministry. But before Jesus starts to preach there's the question of his credentials. What gives him the right to just show up and claim he's the Son of God and Messiah? What gives him the right to speak with authority? Why should we listen to him?

I've been given the opportunity this year to work with the San Francisco Giants as a Chapel Leader and last weekend conducted my first chapel at spring training in Scottsdale. One of the things I learned is how careful they are about who enters the Giants clubhouse. Before I even got close to any players, much less speak into their lives, I had to have the proper credentials around my neck.

It's the kind of thing we hear about a lot. Most of the time, if you're trying to get a job, you need to have the credentials, and you typically write those on a resume. Perhaps it's a degree. Or maybe it's a certain kind of experience. It might even be who you know. A credential is defined as, "a qualification, achievement, personal quality, or aspect of a person's background, typically when used to indicate they're suitable for something."

The issue of credentials comes up in the spiritual realm as well. What gives me the right to stand up here and teach the Scriptures? Is it my degrees or my experience? Is it my ordination? I recall when Ray Stedman came to preach at my ordination 33 years ago. The first thing he did was comment on how strange it was he was asked to do that since he'd never been ordained! I wonder if anyone there had a hard time with that?

Have you ever thought about what kind of credentials you need to be a Christian, to be a child of God? What we're talking about here really is our sense of identity and worth. Most of us focus on our own credentials, building our self worth and identity on our own accomplishments. It might be our education, our career, our intelligence or our net worth. It might be the people we know, the books we've read, the places we've traveled, the impressive kids we've raised. It might even be our own spiritual disciplines. We give generously to the church, we read the Bible and pray every day, we lead a small group Bible study. Any or all of these things might be the credentials we hang around our neck for all to see.

This is an issue even Jesus faced. Who is this man? What gives him the right to be God's Son, the Messiah? Turn to Luke 3. This is the launching pad for Jesus' public ministry.

### **John the Baptist Prepares the Way**

Before we read about Jesus we read about his cousin, John.

**"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (verses 1-3).**

Luke then quotes several Old Testament prophets, showing John's role would be to prepare the way for the Messiah. Every King needs a herald to prepare for his arrival. John appears in the wilderness, calling people to repent and be baptized. The weird thing about this is the Jews believed only Gentile converts needed to be baptized. John calls even Jews to be baptized. Even they won't escape the judgment of God unless they repent. It's not enough to be born a Jew. Someone once said that the job of preaching is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. John wasn't a feel-good preacher, but people still came out in droves to see him. Some of them even thought he was the Messiah, but John said,

**"I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (v. 16).**

John saw himself like the pacesetter in a race. His role was temporary. Eventually he'd fade away and the true Messiah would emerge. He'll baptize them not with water but with the Holy Spirit. Water can't wash away greed, lust and jealousy. For that the Spirit is needed. The Messiah would usher in a new age when they'd be soaked not in water but in the Holy Spirit.

Ask yourself, Would I go out into the wilderness to be baptized by John? Remember, these are religious people. Would I turn away from all I've been depending on to make me feel okay about myself? In today's church we downplay this far too much. John reminds us unless we're ready to turn away from all our ego props we're not ready for Jesus. In a way, this is what we have to do before we get our credentials. We must repent. We must reject the things we've been depending on for our sense of worth and identity. We have to realize our sin goes deeper than

our religion. We need help from outside of ourselves; we need deeper cleansing.

### **Jesus is Baptized and the Heavens are Opened**

It's in this context we're introduced to Jesus. It had to be shocking for Jesus to emerge from the throng of people and offer himself to John for baptism. In 3:21 Luke writes,

**“When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.”**

This is like Tom Brady coming to a Pop Warner practice and asking for instruction from a 12-year-old QB. This is like Mother Theresa approaching Lady Gaga for lessons on charity. This is Jesus. He didn't need to repent! He didn't need to confess sin; he came to save us from sin. But how would he do that? Here we get our first big hint. He'd do that by somehow identifying with us in our sin.

John White tells the story of his days as a medical student. For one of his classes, he missed a practicum about venereal disease and had to make it up at the clinic. When he arrived at the clinic he ended up in a line with some patients who'd contracted venereal disease. He felt pretty embarrassed standing in that line, so he barged up to the front and told the head nurse, “I need to see the doctor.”

“That's what everybody says,” snorted the nurse, “now get in line.”

“But I'm a medical student.”

“Big deal,” said the nurse, “You got it the same way as everybody else; now you can stand in line like everybody else.”

He writes: “In the end I managed to explain to her why I was there, but I can still feel the sense of shame that made me balk at standing in line with the other men who had a venereal disease. Yet Jesus shunned shame as he was baptized. And the moral gulf that separated him from us was far greater than that separating me from the men at the clinic... But he crossed the gulf, joining our ranks, embraced us and still remained pure. He identified with those he came to save. He became like us.” You see, Jesus' baptism was a shadow of the cross. To save us, he needed to identify with us. His baptism was a decisive step of submission and humiliation in a process that began at Bethlehem and would end at Calvary in obedience to his Father's wishes.

What's interesting about Luke's account of this is he downplays the act of Jesus' baptism to highlight what happened right after his baptism. He says nothing about the conversation that took place between John and Jesus that Matthew records in his gospel. For Luke the important thing wasn't what John or even Jesus said, but what God said. Look again at v. 21. It says,

**“And as he was praying, heaven was opened.”**

Imagine that! What did that look like? How did people even know it was happening? The prophet Isaiah once cried out, **“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down...”** (Isa. 64:1). Well, that's what happened here! The heavens are ripped apart, the curtain is pulled back.

All this happened as Jesus was praying. Throughout Luke, Jesus is seen praying. Before he chooses his disciples, he prays (6:12). Before he reveals to his disciples he'd die on the cross, he prays (9:18). The transfiguration takes place on the mountain while he prays (9:28). Before his arrest, he goes into the garden and prays (22:41). Prayer wasn't an afterthought for Jesus, it was the mainstay of his life.

### **His endowment with the Spirit**

Verse 22 says after the heavens opened **“the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.”** Some have seen this as Jesus' calling to public ministry. It was at his baptism Jesus' credentials as the Savior of the world are shown. He's credentialed, first, by his endowment with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes down in a way everyone could see—in bodily form like a dove. We read that and think, “How wonderful. A dove. A sign of peace.” But, as far as I can tell, the dove wasn't a symbol of peace in Jesus' day. We should probably think back to Genesis where the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of creation. The Jews likened the fluttering of the Spirit over the waters at creation to the fluttering of a dove. So the dove at the baptism may mean Jesus is ushering in a new creation. That's why, when he preached he said, “The kingdom of God is here.” A new day; a new creation has dawned with the coming of Jesus and the Spirit is bearing witness to that. From now on, the Spirit will mark his ministry. You can see that just by looking ahead. In 4:1 it says Jesus, **“full of the Holy Spirit,”** was led into the wilderness. Then in 4:14 it says he returned to Galilee **“in the power of the Spirit.”**

Jesus was endowed with the Spirit. But we also know he endows us with the Spirit. Some of his last words to his disciples before he returned to heaven were **“Wait here in Jerusalem until I send the Spirit. When he comes you'll receive power and you'll be my witnesses...”** (cf. Acts 1:4,8). They waited and the Spirit fell. The rest of the book of Acts shows how the Spirit worked through them. Generations of believers since that time are given the gift of the Spirit when they come to faith in him. Without him we don't have what it takes to do what he calls us to do.

When President Bush was at the prayer service for his inaugural, after Billy Graham spoke, they passed the offering plates around. When the plate came to President Bush and his wife it was clear they weren't prepared. He didn't have any cash on him. His aides scrambled. He looked a little embarrassed, until a hand gently reached over his shoulder from the pew behind him with some cash to put in the plate. A relieved President took the cash

and put it in the plate. The funny thing is that the hand over his shoulder was that of his father. Some things never change.

That's a great picture of you and me. As we try to make a difference for Christ, we face things we're not prepared for. We don't have what it takes. Sometimes we scramble to find an answer. But right at our moment of need, God the Father reaches over our shoulder and offers us the Holy Spirit. One thing is for sure: without the Spirit our pockets are empty; we have nothing to offer. His help comes only in our need, so we empty ourselves and receive his help.

On a resume, you normally put down something about your talents; what you bring to the table in ability. Well, this is what Jesus brings to the table and through him what we bring—the creative power of the Spirit. That's quite a credential! The One who fluttered over the waters of creation has landed on the man from Galilee, but he's also landed on us!

### **His endorsement from the Father**

It also helps to have an endorsement; a reference. You need to put a name down on that resume that will impress everyone; someone who'll say of you, "He's good. She's got what it takes. I recommend him." And in a way, we need to know that too. We need to know someone feels that way about us.

Apparently, Jesus needed to know that as well, because in the second part of v. 22 it says,

**"A voice came out of heaven, 'You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well-pleased.'"**

I don't know what God sounded like. He probably had a British accent! I don't even know what language he spoke, but I do know this is a heavenly endorsement. God the Father is saying, "You're my Son. I love you. I'm delighted with you."

Every Jew would have recognized in these words echoes from the Old Testament Scripture. In Psalm 2:7, at the coronation of the King of Israel, God says to the King, "***You are my Son, today I have begotten you.***" Then in the book of Isaiah, God says, "***Behold, my Servant, whom I uphold; my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations***" (Isa 42:1). So in these words the Father is saying Jesus is both sovereign King and suffering Servant. Most of all he's saying, "I delight in you." That's quite an endorsement.

But what about us? When God the Father said to his Son, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well-pleased," he also says this to us who are in his Son. That's what Christians have always believed. When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, we give him our sin, and he gives us his righteousness. We're clothed with Christ. So the Father is every bit as pleased with us as he was with his Son.

Do you know what I love about this? The Father said this to his Son before he healed one single person, preached one single

sermon, or even went to the cross. God affirms him **before** he did all of that. Apart from any works on our part, he affirms us as his beloved. So often, the good works we do are motivated by a desire to earn his affirmation. So we share our faith and lead Bible studies and put money in the offering basket because deep down we believe that's the only way we can really be pleasing to him. But this turns that around. He's pleased with you just because you're in Christ. You can never add to that. And it's as you internalize that and take it to heart that all those good works just flow freely.

Do you know that he is well pleased with you? Do you really believe that? How much do you love your son or daughter? Why do you love them? Because they do the right things? Or just because they're your son or daughter? Most of us live with a lingering feeling that we're a disappointment to God. We see so many flaws and inconsistencies in our own life. How could he not be disappointed?

Lee Strobel tells of a baptism where people were told before they came up to the platform to be baptized to take a piece of paper, write down a few of the sins they've committed, and fold the paper. When they came up to the platform, there was a large wooden cross on the stage. So they'd take the piece of paper and pin it to the cross, because the Bible says our sins are nailed to the cross with Jesus. Here's what one woman wrote who was baptized: "I remember my fear. It was the most fear I remember in my life. I wrote as tiny as I could on that piece of paper the word abortion. I was so scared someone would open the paper and read it and find out it was me. I wanted to get up and walk out of the auditorium during the service, the guilt and fear were that strong. When my turn came, I walked toward the cross, and I pinned the paper there. I was directed to a pastor to be baptized. He looked me straight in the eyes, and I thought for sure he was going to read this terrible secret I kept from everybody for so long. But instead, I felt like God was telling me, I love you. It's okay. You've been forgiven. I felt so much love for me, a terrible sinner. It's the first time I ever really felt forgiveness and unconditional love. It was unbelievable, indescribable."

Do you have inside of you a secret sin that you wouldn't dare write down on a piece of paper out of fear somebody might open it up and find out? Let me tell you something about the Father. Through Jesus, he wants to forgive you and adopt you as his child. He says, "You're my beloved daughter. You're my beloved Son. With you I'm well pleased." That's our identity; our worth; our credential.

### **Jesus' Genealogy is Traced Back to Adam**

That should be enough. But it's not. Right after the baptism of Jesus Luke pauses and gives us a little family history. In verses 23-38 there's a genealogy. Luke starts it with these words in v. 23,

**“Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph.”**

Then he goes on and traces Jesus' ancestry through David and Abraham, all the way back, not just to Adam, but to God himself! Pick it up in v. 38,

**“...the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.”**

So we have 77 names between Jesus, the Son of God, and Adam, the son of God. It's interesting in Matthew's gospel there's another genealogy of Jesus. That one starts with Abraham and moves forward through King David to Jesus. Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience and he wanted to prove Jesus was part of the royal line. But Luke goes all the way back to Adam. Luke wrote for non-Jews. Luke is showing Jesus didn't just come for his own little subset of humanity (the Jews). He came for all. Jesus is related not just to Jews but to all people everywhere because we all come from Adam. He's a universal Savior.

What about us? What kind of family line do we have? All of us are sons of Adam too. Adam was a perfect man created in the image of God. But in his freedom Adam fell into sin, which like a domino effect caused all of us to fall as well. No one since Adam has ever been born with that perfect image. No one except Jesus. He's the new Adam. He's the head of a new race. When we trust him as our Savior, we're adopted into his family, and we can trace our spiritual lineage to him. Put that on your credential!

Where do you look for your sense of identity? Is it from your family line? Martha Taft, great-granddaughter of William Howard Taft, the 27th President, had an interesting way of introducing herself when she was a schoolgirl in Ohio. She'd say, “My great-grandfather was President of the United States. My grandfather was United States Senator. My daddy is ambassador to Ireland. And I'm a Brownie.” Most of us don't have those kind of credentials, but even if we do, how much better to be able to say, “I'm related to Jesus Christ, and through him I'm a child of God.”

We rely on so many false credentials for our sense of identity. For some of us it's our education, career, net worth. For others it's the clubs we belong to, the people we know, the trips we've taken. For still others, it's about our religion—our giving, our service, our disciplines, our obedience. Our culture and our flesh and sometimes even our church say that's what it's all about. That's who you are. But the Word of God says, “No! You've repented of all that. This is who you are. Wear this around your neck. You're in Christ and like him you're endowed with the Spirit, endorsed by the father, and in the family line of, or extracted from, the Son.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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