

The Covenantal Divide: The Anointing of Jesus, Part 2

Luke 3:21-22

God responded, that's the third point in our text, by the way, this is the climax, the response, the affirmation of God. Jesus came to John's baptism as a sincere, obedient Israelite, worshiping God in this act, this baptism of repentance and while he was in that frame of mind, while praying, notice that the end of verse 21, "The heavens are open, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove, and a voice came from heaven. 'You are my beloved son, with you I'm well pleased.'" This section in Scripture represents a covenantal divide. This is a covenantal divide, Luke closed out John's ministry in the previous section, verses 18-20. And when he did, when Luke did that, he turned the page from the Old Testament to the New, he turned from looking at the last Old Testament prophet, one who pointed to the Christ, and he turned to listen to the first New Testament Prophet, who is Jesus. This is the climax folks of this section, not just of the scene, but of the first three chapters.

This is where Luke has been taking us the entire time, and he wants to drive home the point, he wants us to hear from God to consider God's, not his opinion, but his judgment about Jesus. This is God's judgment. And that's what we're going to consider for the rest of our time. Three affirmations here, three affirmations from God. And as we go through each point, we're going to consider the sign and the significance of the sign. We're going to consider the sign and what is signified, okay?

First affirmation, first affirmation, the ESV translates the end of verse 21, with that phrase, "The heavens were opened." Now that word, Heavens, that's plural, right? Well, it's not plural in the Greek. It's the singular, it's heaven. And also, it's definite in the Greek. It's not just Heaven, but it's *The Heaven*, referring to a very specific, a very particular Heaven. To the Greek way of thinking and we kind of think this way, too, there are three heavens, the first heaven refers to the Earth's atmosphere, where the clouds are, where the birds fly, and all of that. The second heaven, that refers to the location of the planets and the stars, what we call outer space. David referred to this second heaven in Psalm 8:3 as "Your heavens," I love this, "The work of your fingers," the work of

your fingers, "the moon, and the stars, which you've set in place."

But the third Heaven, that refers to the hidden spiritual realm, this is the abode of the holy angels, the home of glorified saints, it's the very throne room of God. Third Heaven is what God showed Paul, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, what he describes as a paradise, where "He heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter," a very special place. It's in the third Heaven, that God exists, that God dwells, that the holy angels' dwell, that all of us are spirits, when we leave our body we'll go there to be with God. It's that third Heaven, that opened to Jesus that day, while he's praying, because out of that place came the visible presence of the Holy Spirit, out of that place came the audible voice of God the Father. So what is the significance of this opened heaven?

Here's the message. Jesus has free, unfettered, and full access to Heaven. He is the one for whom Heaven is open wide. The sign of heaven opened signifies the access that Jesus has to God. It's free, unfettered, full access, he is the ladder, the pathway, the conduit of God's blessing to man, and of man's access to God. And that's why John 14:1-6, when Jesus told his disciples that "He's going away to prepare a place for them," he

said in verse 4, "You know the way where I'm going." When Thomas protested, Jesus answered with one of our favorite memory verses, right? John 14:6, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

That's the first affirmation, here, coming out of heaven. Jesus has free, unhindered access to Heaven, Heaven is wide open to him. Second affirmation, beginning in verse 22, "The heavens were opened," and then secondly, "The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove," like a dove. Put it simply and plainly here, this is the anointing of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, to be the Messiah. The Greek literally says here, "He descended, the spirit, the holy." Luke is drawing our attention to the holy, set apart character of the anointing spirit. A holy set apart spirit is poured out on a holy set apart Messiah. Just like that Levitical anointing oil. It's a holy, set apart oil for a holy set apart anointing. That's this Holy Spirit.

As we said before, this is exactly what God told John the Baptist to look for. John 1:33, "He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" John said, I saw it, I was there and "I can testify that this is the Christ, the Son of God." Like Jesus, John also knew his

scriptures. He knew the prophecies of Isaiah that pertain to Christ.

Isaiah said in Isaiah 11:2, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Isaiah 42:1, God here, speaking in the first person says this, "Behold, my servant, whom I uphold my chosen and whom my soul delights." That shows up at the end, right? "In whom my soul delights, I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." Not just his people, by the way, not just Israel, the nations.

There's another passage in Isaiah, which we already referred to. This one comes from the Messiah's perspective. This is Christ speaking. Isaiah 61:1-3, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me." That's Christ speaking. Anointing, it's this idea of setting someone apart for service, for special service for unique role. That's what God's doing here. He's setting Jesus apart for a special calling for this unique role as Messiah, king of Israel. This is what Gabriel told his mother Mary back in Luke 1:32-33 "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, he will reign

over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end."

That was just a brief bit of biblical background, I realized that was very brief. I just wanted you to get enough of a picture to make this one point. With that background, can you tell me in your memory, when did anyone, a priest, a prophet, when did anyone, a man, even a woman, come to anoint Jesus with anointing oil? No human being anointed Jesus with anointing oil. And that's because God stepped in at this point. And he said, I will take care of anointing this one. I will anoint this one. God himself promised Isaiah 11:2, Isaiah 42:1, Isaiah 61:1, I will anoint this one with the Holy Spirit, right?

It was the one anointed by the Spirit that God told John the Baptist, "This is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." This is he who comes to baptize with a baptism greater than any baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is sent here to immerse his people in God's Holy Spirit. It's a profound Ministry of amazing, amazing grace. And by the way, that ministry of grace is ministry of mercy to his people, that is pictured in the very way that the Spirit descended upon him. I told you that the visible, bodily descent of the Spirit,

remember that it resembled the way a dove comes out of flight, comes out of flight and lights upon a branch or on the ground.

This Spirit resembled a dove like that coming out of flight, descending upon Jesus, energetic, fervent. That's part of the picture, but there's more. The way the Spirit descended on Christ like a dove, it implies something of the Spirit's presence upon Christ, something about the nature of his messianic mission. The picture of the dove is a picture of harmlessness, of gentleness and not only is the dove not at all a threatening creature, it is the very picture of a victim used in sacrifice.

Luke has already told us in Luke 2:24, that the humble couple, Mary and Joseph, only had enough money to purchase for a sacrifice, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Remember that? The dove is the sacrifice of those with very little means. The dove is the sacrifice of the poor. Listen, Jesus came in the ministry of a sacrifice for the poor, which is why he could say, without any qualification, Luke 6:20, "Blessed are you who are poor. Yours is the kingdom of God."

Jesus' ministry would be characterized by gentleness, by his concern for the poor and the needy, by his mercy to enslaved sinners, as Isaiah 42:2-3 says, "He will not cry out, he will

not lift up his voice, he will not make it heard in the street, a bruised reed, he will not break and a faintly burning wick, he will not quench." He is the very picture of tenderness, of meekness. With that in mind, I want you to turn ahead a page or two to Luke 4:16.

Luke 4:16, Jesus has come out of the first thing that the Spirit took them into, which is his testing, his temptation in the wilderness. And he returned, it says in verse 14, "In the power of the Spirit to Galilee, report went out, he taught in their synagogues being glorified by all," and it says there in verse 16, "He came to Nazareth," where he'd been brought up, here's his hometown, hometown Prophet come to preach, as was his custom.

"He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovering of the sight to the blind, to set at liberty, those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the

eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth."

You recognize that? We read that earlier, that's Isaiah 61:1-2. But when Jesus read that portion, as it says there directly from the scroll of Isaiah, he intentionally left something out of Isaiah 61:2. Remember what it is? That verse says, Isaiah 61:2, "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God." Jesus stopped reading after that first section, "To proclaim the year the Lord's favor." And then he rolled up the scroll. He's done reading. He gave it back to the attendant, he sat down, he told the people, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," very precise. It's him, it's Jesus.

I don't recommend that any of you pick and choose which parts of the Bible you want to read, okay? That's for Jesus to do as Messiah, he's the son of God, he has all authority to tell us not only what happened, but when it's going to happen, okay? We read all passages in their context, full context. We understand what he did here. Jesus has come as a gentle Savior, a meek Messiah, and God has anointed him with this visible

manifestation of the Holy Spirit, this dove like picture. Because he's here telegraphing the character of his ministry. Jesus, in this first advent is coming as a gentle victim. He's coming as a tender Messiah. He comes to call people to salvation because he himself is the victim of sacrifice, just like a harmless little dove. But, put in parentheses in your mind. He's coming again, right? Second Coming, "The year of vengeance of our God."

Well this is the first affirmation and the second affirmation. First affirmation, heavens wide open to Jesus. Second affirmation, Jesus is the Messiah, he's the Anointed One, not by man, but by the Spirit. It's a holy, set apart spirit with the character of a gentle dove. One who comes as a substitutionary sacrifice for the poor, the very least of these, that is quite the preview of the nature of our Lord and Savior, isn't it?

Well, one more affirmation. "A voice came from heaven, you are my beloved son with you I am well pleased." With that voice, heard from the open heaven. All three persons of the Trinity were on the scene at one time. And notice all three persons of the Trinity have joined the incarnate, visible son, as physical phenomena. John the Baptist was privileged to witness all of

this; John touched the physical body of the Son as he baptized him in the Jordan River. John saw the physical presence of the Spirit as he descended from heaven and rested on Jesus. John heard with his physical ears, physical sound waves reverberating off of his eardrums, as he understood the words spoken from the father, to his beloved son.

There are only two other times that God spoke from heaven in this way, affirming his son, once in Matthew 17:3, at Jesus' transfiguration, and once in John 12:28, in response to Jesus' prayer requests, that the father glorify his name. But here at his baptism, this is the only time that I know of, when all three persons of the Trinity are manifest in some form of physical phenomena here. Just that simple observation, observation here tells us something important. Jesus is the one who makes the invisible God, visible. As John 1:18 tells us, "No one has ever seen God, the only God who is at the father's side, he has made him known." Jesus makes the invisible God visible.

But next, second, notice the affirmation here of a close, loving relationship. God said, you are the son of me; the beloved. The beloved, nearness, closeness, familiarity, intimacy, that's indicated by this father/son relationship and that possessive pronoun again translated, mine, in the ESV or as

we said, of me, in the literal Greek, that possessive idea indicates, your mine. There's a jealousy that the father has for the son.

There is a jealous love that he has for his son's glory, his son's honor. He's zealous for that affection. He's protective of that rep, reputation and that honor, that's love. Most clearly, the loving relationship comes across in that term, "Beloved, you are my son." The Beloved, the emphasis in the Greek is on that last word. Beloved, is the word *agapetos*, which comes from word many of us recognize *agape*.

The son is dearly, highly loved by the father, jealously loved, zealously loved. As Jesus would say, John 3:35, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand." John 5:20, "The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing." Jesus was always assured of his father, and his love for him. Never a doubt, never ever a doubt. So we see affirmations of Trinitarian theology, we see affirmation of a close loving relationship between father and son.

Third, there's an affirmation here of utter uniqueness. Utter uniqueness. Interesting note, or fact about that word beloved. When it's used to speak of an only child, as it is here, it refers to someone who is absolutely unique, a one of a

kind. As Greek students know this is the *monogenes*, the one of a kind, the only one, the only begotten of the father, *monogenes*. Several passages in John's Gospel, he often uses this term *monogenes*, but it will be sufficient to remind all of you, you're familiar with these passages, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, glory as of," the *monogenes*, "the only Son, that is only begotten Son from the father, full of grace and truth."

There's an uniqueness to him, there is an onliness to him and exclusivity. No one has ever seen God, John 1:18, the only God, the *monogenes*, "God who was at the father's side, he has made him known. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his," *monogenes*, his one and only, his begotten, "only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:18, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of," the *monogenes*, "the only begotten Son of God."

All these affirmations, affirmations of Trinitarian theology, of close loving relationship, of absolute uniqueness. All this kind of comes together in a passage in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 17, it says there in Hebrews 11:17, "By faith Abraham,

when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises, was in the act of offering up," his *monogenes*, his only son." That word translated, only son, it's the word *monogenes*, and it reminds us of that heart wrenching passage in Genesis 22.

When God called Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. And in that great chapter, Genesis 22, verse 2, verse 12, verse 16, God said to Abraham, "take your only son," your son, your only son, "Isaac, whom you love. You have not," verse 12, "withheld your son, your only son, from me." Verse 16, "Because you've done this and have not withheld your son, your only son." Over and over, it's your son, it's your only son, it's the son whom you love. It's, let's name him, Isaac.

Knowing the end of that story, how it turned out, God stayed Abraham's hand, wouldn't let him sacrifice his son, turned his attention to the ram caught in the thicket, right? By his horns; indicating that God himself would provide a lamb for sacrifice. It's abundantly clear to us now that God spoke those words to Abraham with the utmost empathy. In Genesis 22, God is not speaking cold and heartless words, things that he has not himself felt and thought through.

These things are absolutely gut wrenching. Filled with *pathos* as God calls Abraham to do what he would one day do with his own son, his own son, his only son, his beloved son, his only son, Jesus. That's what our salvation cost beloved. It is a free gift to be sure. But that free gift let's not forget was so costly. Those three precise affirmations of Trinitarian theology, loving relationship, absolute uniqueness, they show us here that there is no one like him. No one like him.

There's a final statement from the voice out of heaven. And it seals the divine affirmation with unqualified approval. It's that last phrase in you or, "with you, I am well pleased." That is as emphatic an affirmation of approval as can be put into language. And it harkens back to what we read earlier in Isaiah 42:1, "Behold, my servant whom I uphold my chosen, in whom my soul delights, I have put my spirit upon him."

God stamps his punctuation of approval emphatically on Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, his beloved Son, and the tense and the mood of the verb in the Greek *inintate*, indicates here, a timeless approval, looking backward in time and forward in time, all of it taken in a glance of sovereign gaze and says, well pleasing. Jesus' entire life here is under the scrutiny of



an all seeing God and all is declared well pleasing to the holy,
penetrating gaze of God.