

# A Tale of Two Sons

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>23</sup> Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, <sup>24</sup> the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, <sup>25</sup> the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, <sup>26</sup> the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, <sup>27</sup> the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, <sup>28</sup> the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, <sup>29</sup> the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, <sup>30</sup> the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, <sup>31</sup> the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, <sup>32</sup> the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, <sup>33</sup> the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, <sup>34</sup> the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, <sup>35</sup> the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, <sup>36</sup> the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, <sup>37</sup> the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, <sup>38</sup> the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. (Luke 3:23–38)

### Does Your Past Define You?

- A. Does your past define you? Does it ever feel like the family record is just playing on repeat? “What my mom did, I’m gonna do. Who my dad was, I’m gonna be”—a failure, a sinner, a drunkard, a deadbeat, an adulterer. Are you stuck in a downward spiral begun by your parents, or your parents’ parents, or your parents’ parents’ parents?
1. It might be the result of nature (genetics), it might be the result of nurture, but it’s defined you, and you’re stuck.
    - a. But does it have to define you? Do you have to be stuck? Is there a way out?!
- B. The counseling world has been onto these problems, asking these questions, and trying to find solutions for a while now. Listen to David Powlison, a Christian counselor, comment in broad strokes on the various trends he’s witnessed in secular counseling over the years: “For about ten years, through the mid-1900s, wherever you turned in the counseling world you heard that problems in living were caused by painful experiences of being used, misused, and abused by others. Unpleasant emotions and destructive behavior were based on a sense of woundedness and emptiness from bad relationships...Childhood experience was where the action was. Because our families were dysfunctional, we acted out the script of born loser and unhappy victim—until we could find intrapsychic healing and emotional

filling. 'Why do I think bad, feel bad, and act bad? Because I was abused. My father made me do it. Give me healing relationships and help me think healing thoughts about myself.' Those were the glory days of 'nurture'...Then the world changed...

That needy and hurting inner self, so marred by tragic experience, faded into the background. Along about the mid-1990s, everyone discovered that our genes, hormones, and brains caused problems in living. Our bodies, not our families, were dysfunctional...Because our bodies are dysfunctional, we are puppets that dance on neural strings to tunes programmed by our genes—and the right drug can smooth things out when the dancing gets spastic. 'Why do I think bad, feel bad, and act bad? I'm miswired. My physiology made me do it. Give me healing medications to calm me down or lift me up so I can feel and function better.' We are now living in the glory days of 'nature'...If you are a machine with malfunctioning parts, a mere organism, then whatever makes the parts work better will make you better...

The action is now in your body. It's what you got from Mom and Dad, not what they did to you. The excitement is about brain functions, not family dysfunctions. The cutting edge is in hard science medical research and psychiatry, not squishy, soft, feel-your-pain psychologies" (pp. 239-241).

1. "The problem is nurture"—Give them healing relationships, support groups, and we'll get them right. That didn't seem to work. "The problem is nature"—Give them pills, fix their brains or genes, and we'll get them right. That doesn't seem to work either.
- C. Powlison goes on to describe how the secular counseling world has been oscillating between these two (nurture and nature) for decades, and will continue to do so to no lasting avail...unless they would finally start leading their patients to Christ!
1. It is not that some of these things can't be helpful. It's that they don't ever get deep enough.
    - a. Christ is the answer to our nature and nurture problem, because He gives us a new nature and brings us into a new family by His Spirit through the cross.

## The Downward Spiral of Jesus' Genealogy

- A. As I'm reading the genealogy in Luke I'm seeing the downward spiral of a family line. With each passing generation from Adam, it would seem things are just stuck on repeat, and going down.
1. With some of the men in this list, their rise brings fresh hope for change and redemption, but they all ultimately stumble back down to the dirt from which they came. Their fallen nature and nurture always get the last word...it would seem.
- B. But from God's perspective, such a long list of failures was not actually taking us further away from the solution but moving us towards it! While we thought we were going down, truly He's been preparing to lift us up!

- C. The outline for this morning is simple. I want to look at: 2 Sons; and from that draw out 3 Implications.

## 2 Sons

- A. Now, we must ask, “Two sons? Where on earth are you getting two sons? I see 79 sons in this list (yes, I counted). How are you going to say two?”
1. There may be 79 sons in this list, but there are only two sons “of God.” And they appear at the beginning and the end of this list. They frame the genealogy, so to speak, and hence provide for us a window into the ultimate aim of Luke in recording it for us.

### (1) Adam, the Son of God

- A. On the back-end you have: “Adam, the son of God” (v. 38b). That term ought to stagger us! This is humanity’s title according to God’s original design.
1. He’s called the “son of God” because: (1) He was created in God’s image and likeness; (2) He was included in God’s holy family and presence; (3) He was given a position of honor above all creation; and (4) He was given His Father’s world as an inheritance.
    - a. “<sup>3</sup> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup> what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? <sup>5</sup> Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup> You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (Psa 8:3–6). O what privilege, what honor, what glory God bestowed upon humanity at the first!
- B. But it wasn’t enough for was it? It’s never enough for us! There’s always one more thing we think we need.
1. We had everything, except for one thing, and that one thing became everything, and so we ended up with nothing!
    - a. We were sons of God, but we wanted to be God. And our attempt at self-deification was truly our demonization—where sons of God became sons of the Devil. We start to look more like snakes than like God.
      - i. Which again is why we saw John the Baptist welcomed the Jewish crowd the way that he does: “You brood of vipers!” (Luke 3:7)—“You offspring of poisonous snakes!”
- C. The rebellion of Adam sets in motion the fallen nature and nurture that characterizes the 77 names that follow after, moving up from Adam in this list.

1. Humanity is in a desperate state. Like Esau we've all sold our birthright for a bowl of pottage. Like the Prodigal Son we've all sold our inheritance to go wallow in the pig's mud.

## (2) Jesus, the Son of God

- A. And then, at long last, there arrives another Son of God (v. 23)! This second Son of God, as we shall see is being put forward as God's answer to all that went wrong with the first.
  1. Now, to be fair, the text does not refer to Jesus here as Son of God but as "the son...of Joseph." Right? Almost. Luke cannot bear that we might miss Jesus' true status here, so he inserts the parenthesis "Jesus...being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph."
    - a. He means here to direct us to Jesus' true status as Son, not of Joseph, but of God. For in Luke's narrative, God had just declared over Him in v. 22: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."
- B. So, again, Luke's ultimate aim in recording this list is to show Jesus as God's answer to Adam. He alone can deal with our fallen nature and nurture problem at it's deepest level.
  1. In fact, here's how I'm reading Luke's genealogy. I'm seeing the hand of God coming down into humanity like that of a Master Gardener. And He's pulling up a weed here. He's going down, deeper than David, deeper than Abraham, deeper than Noah, all the way back to Adam.
    - a. With the arrival of Jesus, God is pulling this old, fallen humanity up by the roots! And He's planting something altogether new!

## 3 Implications

### (1) The Gospel Requires Genealogy

- A. Genealogies feature quite prominently in the OT.
  1. If you've ever tried to do your daily devotions in books like [Genesis](#) or [1 Chronicles](#) you know what I'm talking about. You're up early, you've got a warm cup of coffee in your hand, you're reading the Bible through in a year, you turn to the next chapter, and it's a genealogy (in 1 Chronicles it goes on for 9 chapters!). And your heart just sinks. "Do I read it, skip it, skim it?"
    - a. Either way, you wonder: "What are these all about?!"
- B. While it seems genealogies became important to the Jewish people for a number of reasons over the years, one reason in particular stands out as fundamental.

1. You recall that the second Son was promised back when the first son fell. [Gen 3:15](#)—a Child will be born to the woman and He will stomp out the head of the serpent, undo the curse of God, and put us and the world back together.
  - a. We spent time on this two weeks ago, so I won't indulge myself much more on it, but suffice it to say this: Because the promise was of a coming Son, by the very nature of the case then, those who are waiting for that promise, are waiting with genealogical records in hand. "Where is this Son?!"
    - i. The hope of the world is hanging on a genealogy!
- C. As redemptive history unfolds, God narrows in more and more on the genealogical line of this promised child. From [Gen 3:15](#) onward, even as the nations diverge and expand out, a golden thread is identified running through the center of them all.
  1. It runs from Adam, through Seth, to Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David, and, ultimately, as Luke displays for us, to Jesus.
- D. The genealogies in the OT, then, exist fundamentally to preserve this line and point the world to it, and to Him. The gospel requires genealogy!

## (2) The Gospel Repudiates Genealogy

### Are You in Christ?!

- A. But, in another sense, amazingly, the gospel repudiates genealogy. While genealogies are given page after page, chapter after chapter, in the OT, when at last they are finally drawn to the person of Jesus Christ, they are not given another thought in the rest of the NT!
- B. But why?! Because the ultimate purpose for the genealogies was fulfilled with the arrival of the promised Son!
  1. The genealogies in the OT are not primarily concerned with preserving Israel's ethnic identity. No! God is preserving Israel's ethnic identity because He promised that from Israel would come the One who would preserve the world!
    - a. And when this One arrives, there is no longer any need for genealogical discussion! He's here! You put the records down and you follow Him!
- C. From the OT to the NT, with the arrival of Christ, there is a significant shift in focus. While the OT's burning question is: "Where is He?" The NT's burning question is: "Now that He's here, are you in Him?!" Nothing else matters now!
  1. Consider Paul's words to the Galatians: "<sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:28–29).

- a. All the distinctions have been repudiated. I don't care if you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. All that matters now is that you are in Him. If you are in Him, you belong in the family room of God!
- D. Perhaps there is no more potent an example of the NT's priority at this point than Paul's opening lines to the Ephesian church: “<sup>23</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,<sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight<sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ<sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.  
<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,<sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:2–14).
- 1. Can you not sense the Apostle's great burden?! The entirety of gospel promise and power is most potently contained within the sphere of the Messiah.
    - a. Blessing, holiness, blamelessness, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, inheritance, it is all coming to us in Christ.
- E. The big question is now and forever not are you of this or that line, do you have this or that pedigree, have you worked this or that much righteousness, do you have this or that mark. No! Only one thing matters now above all else: Are you in Christ?!

### But Why Is Christ the Answer?

- A. But do we know why this is? Why is Christ the answer to all that went wrong with Adam? How does God in Christ pull up our old, fallen humanity by the roots and plant something altogether new? How does He turn sons of the Devil back into sons God?
- B. The answer to these questions, of course, leads us to the cross.
  - 1. Consider the scene as Matthew describes it: “<sup>39</sup> Those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads<sup>40b</sup> ...saying... 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross' [Jesus is the Son of God, in a way no man ever will be. But Jesus doesn't come down.]...<sup>41</sup> So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying...<sup>43</sup> 'He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God''” (Matt 27:39, 40b, 41, 43). [Jesus is the Son of God and He does trust in His Father, in a way Adam never did. But God His Father doesn't deliver Him.]

- C. But why does Jesus not come down? Why does God not deliver His boy? Because they're too busy pulling up roots. Because this is the only way to turn sons of the devil back into sons of God!
1. "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22). He's taking our death so that He can give us His life!
- D. "<sup>3</sup>When we were children, [we] were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,<sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.<sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"<sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal 4:3-7).
1. O the counselors have been right. Nature and nurture are the problem. But they know nothing of the real solution. Jesus doesn't just tinker at us from the outside with a few chemicals or few therapy sessions.
    - a. No! He's coming inside. He's pulling up the old man by the roots and He's implanting a new nature and bringing us into a new family. His Spirit is in us. And now God is our Father.
- E. There's your nature, there's your nurture. There's the answer to our original question: Does your past have to define you? Are we just stuck in the downward spiral? Or is there a way out? There's a way out! And His name is Jesus!
1. I don't care where you come from, who your mom was, what your dad did, what kind of a sinful, broken, shameful past you have, there is an offer this morning to break ties with that old genealogy and come into a new one. Jesus will not only be your Savior He will be your genealogy! When you trust in Christ, you are born again in Him.

### (3) The Gospel Redeems Genealogy

- A. Let me close with a quick reflection on fatherhood. What a text for God to bring us to on Father's Day! The whole thing is one massive tribute, in a sense, to fatherhood: "the son of...the son of...the son of..." a father, a father, a father!
1. These men were all fallen fathers like the rest of us. Read the stories of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, and you'll see.
    - a. But they had one thing going for them: Though they were not the Promised Savior of [Gen 3:15](#), they stood in line to point the nations, their people, and their families to Him.
- B. Dads, we will not be perfect parents, but O let us be pointing parents!

1. We give our children fallen natures in Adam, and we will nurture them imperfectly in our flesh, but that must not keep us from pointing them to the One who can redeem both them and us.
  - a. Let us be parents that walk with our kids to the foot of the cross and glory in His grace together.
  
- C. “A few weeks ago while we sat together in my home office I was trying to show [my son] the significance of his sin in a particular (and regular) situation. I was angry with him and felt defeated. Eventually, I yelled at him out of frustration...Then, in the middle of me trying to diagnose his sin, it seemed every sentence coming out of my mouth revealed questions I needed to answer as well. ‘Don’t you realize that in your actions you’re showing you only care about putting yourself first? Can’t you see the effect your sin is having on our family when you continue to act this way toward the people you love?’

Over the course of a few minutes, the Lord showed me that what I was angry about in my son was the same sin I harbor in my own heart. Pride. Selfishness. It’s disgusting. Oh, it may look different. My sin may become easier to hide and more nuanced with age, but it’s the same ugly root that needs to be severed. My son and I both need the good news of the gospel.

What I thought could be a teachable moment for him ended up being one for me. As I saw the heaviness of my own sin, the burning in my chest became too much to bear, and gave way to tears streaming down my face. This wasn’t the sweet, sentimental tears of television. This was the ugly cry, complete with sorrow and snot. We sat and cried and talked together. It was one of those moments where you just want to sit in it for the afternoon and let whatever is happening silently run its course. We prayed for each other. We confessed our sin together. We grew.

My son is my brother in Christ. We’re fellow heirs, co-combatants in the war against sin. God’s grace is at work in our lives, conforming us to the likeness of Jesus. And one of the ways is through encounters like this one. It was a teachable moment for us both...May we be fathers who point our children to the true and better Father.” (Matt Boswell)

  1. That is how you redeem your genealogy! Not a perfect parent, but a pointing parent.