

Luke 3-4

People were expecting the ultimate king.

Luke jumps ahead another 18 years. He clarifies the date by naming those in power at the the time: emperor, governors, kings, high priests--but the Lord gave his words to an obscure prophet in the wilderness of Jordan. John preached a "thought-changing immersion into forgiveness for sin." As Isaiah (40) foretold, be comforted; in the wilderness build a highway for the Lord's arrival. His glory will be revealed, and all flesh will see it.

Preparation in the wilderness suggests Roman road construction to make the king's arrival a welcome one. It also echoes a nation's wilderness years of preparation to establish a new kingdom in a promised land. People hoped to see God's glory in the flesh. They ached for a king who was just and ultimate.

John corrected false expectations: God's kingdom is first spiritual.

John warned against assuming that your birthright will save you. You won't enjoy God's kingdom on the basis of your birth alone. True mind change will bear fruit. John's examples of the fruit include sharing with those in need and being content rather than abusing your authority for selfish gain (loving your neighbor as yourself, and loving God as your provider). Asked if he was the Savior King, John said he immersed in water, but the coming Savior King would immerse in the Spirit, with fire for those who proved fruitless. The Savior King reigns through his Spirit, who bears fruit in his people.

Luke further illustrates John's message: Herod, a "king" not by right but by political maneuvering, locked up the messenger whose authority came from the heavenly King. This parable happened in history before Jesus told the story. Herod is the unrepentant rebel who kills the King's messenger instead of hearing the message.

By contrast, Jesus came humbly, being immersed along with others. Jesus was baptized by water AND by the Spirit. And Heaven affirmed him as the true, beloved heir of the throne.

Luke's genealogy of Joseph reminds us we're answerable to God.

Heaven said that Jesus was God's son. Jesus was THOUGHT to be the son of Joseph. Being a son could suggest two things: that you are of the same kind as the father (made up of the same stuff) and/or that you belong to the father (in closest relational responsibility). A genealogy points to the latter. While Jesus was uniquely of the same kind as the Father, all of us, descendants who "belong" to fathers and forefathers, belong ultimately to God.

A genealogy was an elaborate way of asking, "Was your father greater than my father?" Luke traces the family of Jesus not only to King David, and not only to father Abraham, but ultimately to God. Luke seems to be saying, "Lest you think Jesus was only a Jew, let's follow this to its source. He was in every way God's--humanly speaking and divinely speaking. And whether you are Jewish or Roman, if you demand a pedigree you will find that you too are answerable ultimately to God."

Luke 4

Satan questions true identity, but Jesus keeps it in God's perspective.

The Spirit led Jesus not directly to a throne but into the wilderness of testing. The Son of God went hungry. Satan questioned his sonship, and Jesus answered by identifying with the message of Deuteronomy: God's words are more essential than food. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms of the

world, and Jesus chose the reign of God. Satan told him to test God's goodness, and Jesus said God is not the one being tested.

To some he is only Joseph's son, but God sent him for the nations. Jesus went home still in the Spirit's power. Everyone was moved by his glory. But when he told his home town that Isaiah's good news was being fulfilled, they said he was merely Joseph's son. Jesus responded by saying that Elijah was sent not only for Israel but for Sidonians, and Elisha was sent not only for Israel but for Syrians. The locals threatened to kill Jesus, so he left. Nazarenes said, "Stay where you belong," but Jesus said God cares about all nations.

He has authority over the physical and the spiritual.

In Capernaum people recognized Jesus' authority even before he healed anyone. A demon called attention to the town that had just rejected Jesus and said, "I know who you really are: God's saint." Jesus silenced and cast out the demon. People saw that Jesus had authority over spirits. Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, so all kinds of sick people came and he healed them. Many demons came out shouting, "You are God's Son." But Jesus silenced them, because they knew him to be the Savior King.

People wanted Jesus to stay, but he said he was sent to make known the good news of God's kingdom to others also. He preached in many synagogues.

People wanted to keep Jesus for themselves, but his purpose was to spread the good news of God's kind of kingdom.

Reflections:

From the beginning, Jesus encountered opposition from the spiritual enemy.

John faced opposition from the worldly kingdom.

John AND Jesus confronted selfish misunderstanding of God's purposes.

It's not that Jesus was disinterested in material needs; healing was one of the earliest marks of his message. The conflict was that people were resistant to the Spirit who produces humble love for God and unselfish love for others. People (and the devil) keep trying to turn the work of God into something they could control for selfish purposes. The spiritual kingdom does not work that way.

Jesus spoke (and demonstrated) undiluted GOODNESS.

Yet people kept him at arms length. They missed the real life he was delivering.

Why? As far as I can see, it is because it isn't packaged in a form they can control.

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