

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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**Series:** Exposition of Romans  
**Number:** 161  
**Text:** Romans 12:1-2; 5:12-21; Matt. 3:13-4:11  
**Date:** September 9, 2012 (a.m.)

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### **THE GREAT MERCY OF GOD IN THE OBEDIENCE OF THE LAST ADAM**

The Gospels describe a number of events in the life of Jesus that carry great significance in understanding the federal headship of Christ. Two of these – His baptism and temptation in the wilderness – each underscore the representative character of Christ’s mission. Regarding the temptation in the wilderness, S. Lewis Johnson noted that two events in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament provide the background to understanding the account of the temptation of our Lord in Matthew. The first Old Testament story is that of Adam in Eden. It was Augustine, following the Apostle Paul, who said that the entire moral and spiritual history of the world revolves around two people, Adam and Christ. To Adam, called “son of God” in Luke 3:38, was given the position of king of the earth. He had a position to maintain, but he did not maintain it, and the plight of the world for centuries was decided. And then the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45, 47) appeared, and the second trial of the race arrived. All was at stake again. Again we were represented by a Champion, by One man who represented us all — whose standing would be the standing of many, and whose fall, if such a fall had been conceivable, would have been the fall of all. The second Old Testament story is found in Deuteronomy 6–8. It concerns the nation of Israel, also called God’s “son” (Ex. 4:22). “Israel’s sonship was modeled on Adam’s, since God is the Creator-Father [of them both].” Following the exodus out of Egypt, called by Paul the nation’s “baptism” (1 Cor. 10:2), Israel spent forty years in the desert being tested by God. During that time they failed the test, grumbling about food (Ex. 16 [v. 12]), complaining about lack of water (Ex. 17:1–7), and worshipping an idol, a golden calf (Ex. 32). During that time they were exhorted to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). But they failed to do so. The New Testament story that is crucial to an understanding of Jesus’ temptation is the account of His baptism (Matt. 3:13–17). The one event follows right after the other as Matthew, Mark, and Luke all make clear. Mark (1:12) says that the temptation took place “immediately” (*euthus* lit. straightway, without hesitation.) after the baptism. At His baptism Jesus had been anointed by the Holy Spirit for His work as Servant of the Lord and Messianic King—to the work of dying for His people and reigning over them. The Father from heaven had solemnly and lovingly saluted Him as His Messianic Son. But God’s calling must be tested, and His servants must pass the test. Adam and Israel had failed. Matthew, Mark and Luke each collectively bear witness to the fact that the wilderness temptation occurred immediately after Jesus was baptized. His baptism was nothing less than identification with those for whom He came to die. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. Jesus needed no repentance, but He underwent it to show that He was the sin-bearing representative of His people.<sup>1</sup> It was, as Nicholas Batzig points out, most likely also the Messianic anointing with which His public ministry was inaugurated. This event, for the first time in human history, led to the unfolding

of the mystery of the Trinity. There at the Jordan, the Father pronounced his declaration of delight over the Son, as the Spirit descended upon Him. The readers' mind must reach back to the first manifestation of the Spirit, where, at the creation of the world, He is said to have hovered over the waters that the Father and Son spoke into existence. The declaration of the Father at Jesus' baptism was meant to carry the Son through His entire ministry, especially through the atoning death He was to endure on the cross. The declaration that Jesus was the Father's beloved Son, is put both to Jesus and to those who were present at the baptism. Jesus was obeying the Father by undergoing a baptism of repentance—a "repentance" that He alone, of all mankind, did not need. As the representative of His people, Jesus was obeying what His Father had commanded Israel to do, and was therefore well pleasing to Him. He was, in brief, the second Adam doing all that the Father commanded His people to do. The descent of the Spirit had a twofold purpose. For the one baptizing, it was a mark that the Messiah had come. For the One being baptized, it was the guarantee of the Father's pleasure in the Son. R. A. Finlayson summarized this well when he wrote: Outwardly the descent of the Spirit publicly identified Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah. The witness of John the Baptist that before the baptism in Jordan he "knew him not" cannot refer to personal acquaintance with Jesus, since as kinsmen they knew each other from boyhood. But it does refer to the fact that He did not recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah until he was given the witness of the Spirit at the baptism. The descent of the Spirit must be regarded as having also an inner significance for our Lord Himself beyond His public dedication to His office as Messiah. He needed the Holy Spirit to bring a new anointing to His manhood, with all the tenderness, and patience, and gentleness that the dove-like form symbolized. It is indeed significant that the dove-like Spirit did not on this occasion descend like fire, as He did afterwards at Pentecost. Fire scorches, purifies, and burns up the dross. But in the nature of our Lord there was no dross to be burnt. It is only in His approach to sinful men that the Spirit is as fire; on Him He is the dove. And as the Holy Dove He equipped the manhood of the Lord for the gracious ministry on which He was entering. The voice from heaven was a confirmation of the Father's pleasure with the obedient Son. It was the audible counterpart of the visible manifestation of the Spirit. These two confirmations of Jesus' Person and work would carry Him through His ministry. Sinclair Ferguson notes: He had been "Christ-ed," anointed into the office of King, by the powerful coming of the Holy Spirit on Him at His baptism in the River Jordan (Luke 3:21-22). That pointed Him forward to the overwhelming baptism into death He would experience at Calvary (Luke 12:50). By that baptism of blood He would conquer sin, death, and Satan (Col. 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14-15).<sup>2</sup>

### **I. JESUS: THE LAST ADAM AND THE SECOND MAN.**

My late professor of theology, S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. pointed repeatedly to the distinction between Christ as the *last* Adam and the *second man*. He is the *last* Adam in the sense that that will never be another federal head of the human race. If He fails, it is all over and done with. Christ is called the *second man* because like the *first man* Adam, He stands as the one charged with fulfilling the covenant Adam broke. A comparison of the first three evangelists reveals the fact that Jesus was immediately taken from His baptism into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Just as all three Persons of the Godhead are for the first time revealed at the baptism, so also the two central figures of that first Gospel promise (Gen. 3:15) met for the first time on the battlefield of the wilderness. This is the beginning of Christ's work as Messiah. The apostle John explained this when he wrote: "For this reason the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." He had come into the world to deal with the one who brought rebellion into the world. He had come to conquer the one who had conquered man. At first glance it does not appear that the Son of God is in the wilderness to deal with the evil one, but that the evil one is there to deal with him. But the subsequent act of casting out demons proves that He had to "first enter the strongman's house" and bind the strongman before He could plunder his goods.

On one hand, the temptation of the Messiah should strike us as strange, and on the other, as most necessary. It should seem strange to us because the very idea of weakness seems antithetical to the nature of a conqueror; but it should not surprise us because "It is quite true that long previous Biblical teaching...must have pointed to temptation and victory as the condition of spiritual victory. It could not have been otherwise in a world hostile to God..."<sup>3</sup> The revelation of Christ's Person and work is the preeminent focus of the temptation narratives. We may learn much about the tempter's strategies and the weapons of our warfare, but we must first ascertain the Captain of our salvation as He, by His obedience, secures the blessings of the sons of God on our behalf. Alfred Edersheim masterfully summed up the significance of Christ's baptism and temptation when he wrote: From the Jordan to the wilderness with its wild beasts, from the devout acknowledgement of the Baptist, the consecration and filial prayer of Jesus, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the heard testimony of heaven, to the forsakenness, the felt want and weakness of Jesus, and the assaults of the Devil--no contrast more startling could be conceived. And yet, as we think of it, what followed upon the baptism, and that it so followed, was necessary, as regarded the Person of Jesus, His work, and that which was to result from it."<sup>4</sup> Luke's account of our Lord's temptation serves this conclusion as well. There are no references to the wild beats in this record, but there are clues in the larger context of the book that lend support to this idea. Luke begins his Gospel with a genealogical record of Christ's lineage. Many attempts have been made to explain the differences between Luke and Matthew in regard to the genealogies. Generally speaking, evangelicals have accepted on solid exegetical ground, the conclusion that Luke is tracing Jesus' genealogy through Mary's lineage. Matthew, in contrast, is showing that Christ is the rightful heir of the kingdom of Israel by virtue of Joseph's ancestry. While actually only biologically descended from Mary, Jesus was nevertheless considered Joseph's son in the truest and fullest sense. Luke, as distinct from Matthew, traces Christ's lineage back to Adam. It is interesting to note the way Adam is described in Luke 3: 38, "Adam, the Son of God." Starting with the first verse of the beginning of the section (3:23), skipping the verses in between, and picking up at verse 38 at the end of the genealogy, we read: "Now Jesus Himself was about 30 years old when He began His ministry, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph...the Son of Adam, the Son of God." On the one hand, Jesus' ancestry reaches back to Adam, the first man--He is the "*Last Adam*"--on the other hand, Jesus' genealogy reaches back into eternity--He is the "*Son of God*." As such, He comes to undo all the damage that the first Adam had done--all the sickness, sin and death. It is important to note the way in which Luke focuses on the compassion and healing ministry of Christ in his Gospel record. Some have speculated that this is simply because Luke was himself a physician and was, therefore, more enamored with the compassionate healing ministry of Jesus. While this is certainly true, the more theological explanation is that Jesus is the Last Adam, and is set forth by Luke as the great "physician" (Luke 4:23; 5:21). He came to deal with the misery brought into the world by the first Adam. It seems natural to see Luke's temptation account as more specifically relating to Jesus as the Last Adam who obeys in every way all that the first Adam failed to obey.

## **II. Jesus: True Israel**

There is another reason why the Son of God had to go into the wilderness to be tested. Our minds must now be carried back, not to Eden where Adam was to dress and keep, but to the wilderness where Israel was tested. Israel, as a nation under law, was God's son. As a corporate entity, God's son, Israel, was to obey Him and so be a witness to the surrounding nations. Like Adam, Israel was called God's "son" (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 18:5; 32:19), but as the biblical description unfolds it becomes clear that not all Israel was of Israel (Rom. 9:6)--that is, not all who had the adoption of common grace had the adoption of saving grace. There was always a remnant (Isaiah 1:9; Romans 11:5) who, by faith in the coming Son of God, had the saving adoption confirmed. It was only union with the true Israel, Jesus Christ, which secured the blessing of the covenant for individual Israelites. This theme lies at the heart of Matthew's

Gospel. There is a recapitulation of Israel's history in the life and ministry of Jesus. The obedience of the true Israel lies in stark contrast with the disobedience of the Old Covenant people of God.<sup>5</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** Herman Ridderbos, noted Dutch New Testament scholar observed, that the first and second Adam do not represent two timeless, dualistic “principles” or modes of existence standing over against each other, but stand to each other in a redemptive-historical (typical-antitypical; Rom. 5:14) relation, whereby Adam is “the first” and Christ “the second” or “the last” in the divine economy of redemption. Therefore, it also applies to believers that they will bear the image of the latter, just as they have borne the image of the former (cf. v. 49). Thus when in this context it is said of Christ that he is the second man from heaven and he is for this reason called the heavenly (v. 48), that is not an allusion to his heavenly pre-existence. Not only would it be difficult to reconcile that with what is said, for example, in Romans 8:3 of Christ’s coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, but also his own could not be called “the heavenly,” as is done in verse 48, without contradiction with what is here first said of their earthly origin. The expression “from heaven” or “heavenly” gives a further qualification of the second man as the Risen One. It indicates that as the second Adam and as the Inaugurator of the new life of the resurrection Christ lives from the power of the heavenly, divine Spirit. In that sense accordingly those who belong to him can be spoken of as “the heavenly.” They are not such because they come from heaven, or are going to heaven, but because they belong to Christ as the one living from divine power and in this way will bear the image of the heavenly, as they have once borne the image of the earthy. This future, heavenly image can now also be called the pneumatic body. *Pneuma* and pneumatic thus do not denote a new substance, but a new determination or origin. The new body does not “consist of” *pneuma*, but is brought forth and determined by the divine, heavenly power. For that reason (and not on the ground of what is inherent in the pneumatic “substance”) it can now be said of this body that it is imperishable, immortal, the very model of glory and power (vv. 42, 43, 48, 53). Paul can also write in Philippians 3:21 therefore that Christ will change our humiliated body so that it becomes conformed to his glorified body, according to the power whereby he is able even to subject all things to himself. Here again Christ himself is the one who – as life-giving Spirit – will change the body of his people. The relation between Christ’s mode of existence as the Risen One and that of believers is expressed very clearly. What in 1 Corinthians 15:49 is called “bearing the image of the heavenly,” is called here “becoming conformed to his [Christ’s] glorified body” (cf. Rom. 8:29, where the combination of both elements occurs: “Becoming conformed to the image of his [God’s] Son”). One will thereby have to take the word “conformed” not only as a likeness in appearance or shape, but in mode of existence. It is a question of receiving a share in the glory of Christ, the bearing of his image. Although the first man is also called the image and the glory of God (1 Cor. 11:7), he was this nevertheless within the limits of his original mortal existence derived from the earth. Over against that, becoming conformed to the glorified body of Christ (or, as Rom. 8:29 says, to the image of God’s Son) signifies sharing in the glory of God in the recreation by the Spirit, the imperishable and immortal body of the resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

## **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> The sermons of S. Lewis Johnson Believers Chapel SLJInstitute.net/www/sermons/NT/Mattpdf.

<sup>2</sup> <http://feedingonchrist.com/the-obedience-of-the-second-adam-and-true-israel/> as cited by Nicholas T. Batzig

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* I (Longmans, Green & Co. 1912) p. 292

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. as cited by Batzig.

<sup>5</sup> This section is adapted from Batzig and first appears at Reformation 21, (May 2009) the online magazine of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals.

<sup>6</sup> H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Eerdmans 1975) pp. 543-545