

The Story (21) – No Ordinary Man

By Ashby Camp

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I. Review and Introduction

A. Two weeks ago we looked at Jesus' birth, the absolutely mindboggling event of one the three persons of the Godhead, God the Son, entering into human existence as the God-man Jesus.

1. Systematic theologians sometimes summarize the incarnation this way: "Remaining what he was [that is, fully divine], he became what he was not [that is, fully human as well]." If that doesn't blow your mind, nothing will.

2. I have on more than one occasion quoted the following statement from a theologian named Wayne Grudem: "The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe."

B. Last week we looked in a rather general way at aspects of Jesus' ministry prior to his crucifixion. From his baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus embarked on a new phase of his messianic mission.

1. He announced the arrival of the long-awaited kingdom of God and made clear that he was the kingdom bringer, the one through whom God was acting to heal the broken creation from the dreadful effects of the sin that had invaded it.

2. In his teaching he corrected certain misconceptions about the nature and coming of the kingdom of God, making clear that it comes in two stages. There is an initial introduction or inauguration which is relatively small or unobtrusive, then there is an interval of time, and then there is a decisive, spectacular intervention when the kingdom is consummated or finalized at Christ's second coming. The very small beginning in the end yields a great effect. We live in the overlap of ages, the time between the comings of Christ, when the kingdom is a present reality that coexists with the old age or old order.

3. In his teaching Jesus also presented the radical righteousness to which God calls kingdom participants. We are to live, by the power of the Spirit, Christlike lives, lives that are so morally distinct that people will see our good deeds and give glory to God. This side of the consummation we will fail to be all that we should as grateful recipients of God's mercy, but

Christlikeness remains the goal. We pursue it devotedly but without anxiety because we know our inheritance is a gift not something we earn by our moral living.

4. In his ministry Jesus also demonstrated the character of the kingdom and gave us a foretaste of it through his healings, miracles, and exorcisms, and he also trained the Apostles to prepare them for ministry when he was gone.

C. The topic for today is "No Ordinary Man." From what we have already seen over the last two weeks, that clearly is an understatement, but I want to highlight and emphasize that fact this morning.

II. Jesus' Extraordinary Nature

A. Jesus' extraordinary nature is evident in the things he said

1. The Bridegroom in their midst (Mat. 9:14-15; Mk. 2:18-20; Lk. 5:33-35)

a. One of Jesus' departures from tradition that upset some people was his breaking of the tradition of regular fasting. The O.T. prescribed a national fast on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Num. 29:7; Acts 27:9), and it seems from 1 Sam. 14:24 and Jer. 36:6 that a fast could be called in special times of penance, such as times of crisis or emergency. Several fasts apparently had become customary after Judah's exile to Babylon, falling on days that were significant in terms of the siege of Jerusalem (see Zech. 7:1-5, 8:19).

b. In the intertestamental period, fasting in Judaism increased. It had become an expected mark of piety. But Jesus and his disciples did not engage in regular voluntary fasts. On the contrary, Jesus was more associated with feasting, so much so that he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard (Mat. 11:19; Lk. 7:34).

c. This was such an obvious difference between Jesus and his disciples on the one hand and the Pharisees and John's disciples on the other that he was asked to justify it; he was asked in Mk. 2:18 (Mat. 9:14; Lk. 5:33) to explain why John's disciples and the Pharisees fast but his disciples do not. Mark 2:19-20 reports (ESV): *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day."*

d. Jesus says that his disciples do not fast because the current period is like the celebration of a wedding feast when the groom is present. Wenham notes (p. 28), "The implication is that something joyful and significant, like a wedding, is taking place in Jesus' ministry and, furthermore, that Jesus is the bridegroom at the wedding, being the reason for the joy and celebration."

e. And, of course, the joyful and significant thing that is taking place in Jesus' ministry is the ushering in of the long-awaited kingdom of God. Linking the kingdom to a feast is not surprising in light of a text like Isa. 25:6-8, which employs that imagery. Indeed, Jesus makes explicit the connection between the kingdom and a wedding feast in Mat. 22:2, where he says (ESV) *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son . . ."* He does it again in Mat. 25:1-13. In speaking of himself as the bridegroom, Jesus appropriates for himself imagery that in the Old Testament is used of God. See, e.g., Isa. 5:1, 54:5-6, 61:10, 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2, 2:32; Ezek. 16:6-8; Hos. 2:19. This is a somewhat veiled identification of himself with God.

f. This is why Jesus says in Mat. 13:17 (ESV), *"For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."* R. T. France comments in *Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 515:

The prophets looked forward to the day of eschatological restoration, to the coming of what Jesus now calls 'the kingdom of heaven,' but saw it only in prefiguration and promise, not in existential reality. . . . Like Abraham, who 'rejoiced to see my day' (John 8:56), the prophets spoke of 'the grace given to *you*,' aware that their service was not for their own benefit but for '*yours*,' things which even angels are agog to get a glimpse of (1 Pet 1:10-12)! There is an incredulous wonder running through these NT reflections on the privilege of those who live at the time when God's saving purpose comes to fruition.

2. Greater than Jonah and Solomon (Mat. 12:41-42)

a. Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees in Mat. 12:41-42: *The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*⁴² *The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*

b. The point, of course, is that they are culpable for refusing to recognize in him a preaching more powerful than that of the prophet Jonah and a wisdom greater than that of King Solomon. The people who recognized the lesser in Jonah and Solomon will condemn those who refused to recognize the greater in Jesus.

3. Sermon in the synagogue

a. As we saw last week, early in Jesus' ministry he made clear when speaking in the synagogue in Nazareth in Luke 4 that he was "no ordinary man." Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 where the speaker in the text has been anointed with God's Spirit, has been called to preach good news to the poor, was sent to proclaim release to the captives and sight to the blind, was sent to set free the oppressed, and was sent to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

b. This text was understood in first-century Judaism to refer to the dawning of God's long-awaited new age. It is a messianic text in which the "great correction," the time of setting all things right, is ushered in by the anointed servant of God.

c. After reading the texts, Jesus sat down, meaning he took the posture of a teacher, and said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." It was fulfilled in that Jesus, the one who ushers in the New Age, the Messianic Era, the kingdom of God, had arrived. Jesus is saying to his hometown audience, "The time that all people faithful to God have been waiting for is now here and it is found in me." He is the long awaited Messiah.

4. Woman at the well (Jn. 4:7-26) – You recall Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well in John 4. At the end of their talk she said (v. 25), "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus just tells her flat out, "I who speak to you am he."

5. When Jesus was on trial, the high priest charged him under oath to tell whether he was the Christ, the Son of God (Mat. 26:63). This obligated him under the law to respond (Lev. 5:1), and so Jesus told him. Matthew reports Jesus as answering (v. 64), "You have said so," which serves as an affirmative answer, a "yes," while at the same time carrying a nuance here of "in a sense that is beyond or not exactly what you envision by your question." In other words, it means "Yes, I am the Christ but you have some misconceptions about what that means." The Spirit did not deem that nuance relevant for Mark's reader, so he just gave the "take home" point of the answer (v. 62): "I am."

6. Jesus and Abraham (John 8:56-58)

a. In Jn. 8:56 Jesus tells the Jews, "*Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.*" The claim that Abraham had insight into the Messiah's future coming would not have raised hackles in ancient Judaism because that idea was circulating in Jewish theology. What was upsetting to the Jews is Jesus' plugging himself into the role of the Messiah whose days Abraham saw.

b. The next verse (v. 57) states, *So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"* They twisted Jesus' statement that Abraham saw his day into the claim that he had seen Abraham, which would make him more than 2,000 years old, and then tried to attack him for making a ludicrous claim. He obviously was not that old.

c. But rather than correct their false assumption, Jesus takes the opportunity of their perverse attack to teach something even greater. He responded (v. 58), "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.*" Notice he did not say before Abraham was I *was* but before Abraham was I *am*. Not only does he say he preexisted Abraham, he ties that preexistence to his identity as God. "I am" is how God referred to himself in Ex. 3:14.

d. Though modern scholars sometimes have trouble grasping the import of Jesus' words, the Jews knew perfectly well what he was saying. Verse 59 states, *So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.*

7. In Jn. 14:6 Jesus makes clear that he is the exclusive avenue for a right relationship with God. He declared, *"I am **the** way, and **the** truth, and **the** life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* There is nothing ordinary about that.

8. That Jesus is no ordinary man is evident in his call to unrivaled loyalty. He said in Mat. 10:37-39, *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* The same idea is expressed slightly differently in Lk. 14:26-27: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."*

B. Jesus' extraordinary nature is evident in his actions as well as his words.

1. In Matthew 14 Jesus walks on the Sea of Galilee in the midst of wind and waves, and the wind died down when he (with Peter) climbed into the disciples' boat. Matthew 14:33 says, *And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."* Only God is to be worshipped (e.g., Mat. 4:10), and here Jesus makes no objection to their worship of him. Nor does he object when the blind man he healed worships him in Jn. 9:38, when he is worshiped after his resurrection in Mat. 28:9, 17, or when Thomas calls him "my Lord and my God" in Jn. 20:28.

2. In Mark 2 Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic, and the scribes protested (v. 7): *"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* You see the same reaction in Lk. 7:49 to Jesus' having forgiven the sins of a certain very grateful woman.

3. And, of course, the tremendous miracles Jesus performs confirm that he is no ordinary man. The Gospels record some 37 miracles that were performed by Jesus. These include healings of the sick and diseased, the blind, the deformed (withered hand), the paralyzed and cripple, the deaf, and the mute; numerous exorcisms; the raising to life of three dead people (widow's son at Nain, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus); the feeding of 5,000 men (plus the women and children) and 4,000 men (plus the women and children from five loaves and two fish and from seven loaves and a few small fish, respectively); and his immediate calming of a ferocious storm. When the disciples saw him calm the storm they marveled and said (Mat. 8:27), *"What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"* Definitely no ordinary man!