

## Sermon – 05/09/2010 am

### Jesus like Us

Study Text: Luke 2:21-24

Who can be the prime minister of our nation? Anyone who is a citizen of this country. A person who is not a citizen cannot vote and cannot represent us in the parliament. In the USA the president has to be a citizen and also has to be born in that country. To represent the people of America at the highest level you must be born a citizen of that country.

As descendants of Adam and Eve every human being is united in sin. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). Every human being is born in sin and as such born as an enemy of God because God hates sin. How are we to escape this condemnation? Is there some way we can reason with God and overcome the hostility? Is there someone to plead for mercy on our behalf?

Is there someone who can represent us in the court of the Almighty? Job realized that God is not a man who can be approached in a court of men. He realized we need a mediator, *one who may lay his hand on us both* (Job 9:33). We need someone to represent us as sinful human beings yet one who can stand before the Holy God.

### Circumcision

Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to her firstborn son. The baby in the manger at Bethlehem was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The angel told Mary the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God (1:35). As the Son of God he was born without sin. God acted to break the deadlock and indeed hopeless situation of the human race. A sinless representative would never be found without God's intervention.

God sent his only begotten Son into the world as a child born to the Virgin Mary. In Jesus Christ we have a man, a man born of the seed of David and yet a man without sin. *He was made like his brothers in every way, yet without sin* (Hebrews 2:17, 4:15). *God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh on account of sin* (Romans 8:3). *God sent forth his Son born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law* (Galatians 4:4).

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham and with his descendants. *Every male child among you shall be circumcised* (Genesis 17:10). It was not a meaningless sign. Circumcision means to cut around or to cut off. The removal of skin symbolized the removal of sin. Circumcision in the flesh pointed to circumcision in the heart, a recognition and rejection of sin.

Every human baby is born in sin, except for Jesus. Jesus had no need to be circumcised because he was born without sin. He submitted to circumcision to identify with those he came to represent, namely sinners like you and me. He would later submit to baptism for the same reason. John was baptizing people who repented of their sin when Jesus came to him. Jesus did not need to repent because he had no sin but he asked John to baptize him anyway.

Jesus was born under the law, so he submitted himself to the requirements of the law. In fact he would fulfil the law, making it obsolete through the implementation of a new covenant in his own blood (Hebrews 8:13). Many Jews thought that through the law they could approach God and obtain forgiveness of sin. They thought that circumcision in the flesh automatically made them righteous before God. There are many today who believe that by doing certain things, or not doing certain things, they

can be righteous before God. The apostle Paul said clearly that by works of the law no one will be justified (Galatians 2:16).

John's parents took him to be circumcised and named eight days after birth (1:59). Jesus' parents did the same. Circumcision was a necessary identification with the people he came to save. Circumcision was also a public testimony, declaring Jesus to be a Jew. He would preach the kingdom of God among the people whom God had prepared for this message.

If Jesus had not been circumcised he would not have been allowed to enter the temple or a synagogue, let alone preach in them. If Jesus had not been circumcised he would not have been received by the Jews. In the end they did not receive him anyway but at least they did not have the excuse that he was not circumcised as required by the Law of Moses.

Jesus submitted himself to circumcision and to the law. As the Son of God he was the giver of the law and not subject to the law. J. C. Ryle wrote 'he that was above the law would come under the law, to free us from the law'. Is this what you believe? Jesus humbled himself in this way in order to be our representative and our mediator. He came to *deliver us from the curse of the law, becoming the curse for us* (Galatians 3:13). Those who want to continue under the law see no need of a deliverer.

The apostle Paul may have reflected upon these things as he sought to imitate his Saviour and Lord. He wrote 'though I am free from all men I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; to the Jews I became as a Jew to win Jews; to those under the law as under the law that I might win those under the law' (I Corinthians 9:19-20). Is this not a lesson we also can take from the example of Jesus. We will not advance the gospel by highlighting our differences or distinctives. Rather we must highlight the glorious truth of salvation in Jesus Christ.

At his circumcision he was given the name Jesus. Mary probably told Joseph and maybe others that this was the name the angel gave the child before he was conceived in the womb. There was no contention about the name Jesus. 'Jesus' is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew 'Joshua', a name meaning 'the Lord saves'. Jesus is given many glorious names in the Scriptures (Isaiah 9:6), but nothing is more comforting to us than the name Jesus or Saviour.

J. C. Ryle states 'he selects a name which speaks of mercy, grace, help and deliverance for a lost world. It is as Deliverer and Redeemer that he desires principally to be known'. It is *at the name of Jesus that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess* (Philippians 2:10).

Let us be sure that we know that glorious name and understand what it means. Let us be sure to honour the name that is above all names amidst the ignorance and blasphemy that is rampant in our society. Let us confess this name, the name of the incarnate Son of God who gave himself as the sacrifice for our sins – the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

## Purification

The baby Jesus was taken up to the temple in Jerusalem forty days after his birth *for their purification* (2:22). What was this all about? Well, Luke explains some of it to us with references to the Law of Moses. *Consecrate to me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel both of man and beast; it is mine* (Exodus 13:2). Luke referred to these words. He referred to the law of purification after child birth as detailed in Leviticus 12. We will look at this second matter first.

A woman was unclean for seven days after parturition. As such she was not allowed in the temple to worship God. An unclean person had to be ritually purified before going into the sanctuary. A person who contacted an unclean person was rendered unclean also. The law stated that if she gave birth to a son she would remain unclean for a further 33 days – longer if she had a girl. At the end of this time the

woman was to bring a lamb and a dove or pigeon to the priest as a sin offering. This offering would make her clean.

At the end of 40 days Mary went up to the temple to be ceremonially purified. It was not far from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. She brought to the priest a pair of doves or two young pigeons according to the law. One was for a burnt offering and the other a sin offering. In this way she was made clean. There was provision in the law for two birds rather than a lamb and a bird where the person was not able to bring a lamb (Leviticus 12:8). It is apparent that Mary and Joseph were too poor to bring a lamb. This is another indication of the poverty into which the Son of God was born.

It is a shame that so many Christians despise the poor and are horrified at the prospect of ever being poor themselves. They do not welcome poorly dressed people into their crystal cathedrals. They prefer to parade rich and famous people before their assembly as examples of those whom the Lord has blessed. They promise their followers health, wealth, and happiness from the Lord.

But here we read of the poor family into which Jesus was born. It is difficult to imagine a feed trough made of gold and the smelly stable like a perfumed palace, but some seem to manage! How many would find it embarrassing if they had to go into a stable or small hut to worship, or walk into the temple with just two small birds rather than lamb as an offering?

Because Jesus was the firstborn Son of Mary he was taken with her to the temple and presented to the Lord according to the law of the firstborn male as found in Exodus 13. The firstborn son belonged to the Lord as a memorial of the Passover. Firstborn animals were sacrificed to the Lord or sometimes redeemed. Firstborn sons were set apart to the Lord. They were as those that were passed over.

Samuel was set apart to serve the Lord, although this law was not referred to in his case. John was set apart to serve the Lord in unique circumstances. Jesus was also brought to the temple at 40 days of age and consecrated to the Lord according to the Law of Moses. 'Right from the very beginning until the end Jesus served God perfectly and glorified him by his voluntary and complete devotion'.

How many parents today bring their child to the house of the Lord as Mary did? How many parents desire that their child serve the Lord as women like Hannah, Elizabeth and Mary did? In India it was commonly said in the mainline churches that if a son failed to get into medicine or into science or engineering he could go to Bible College. Is it any different here? In times of revival this changes. Parents want their son to go to Bible College and serve the Lord. Let us pray for revival in our land.

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