

Potomac Hills Community Church

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The Plan of God Revealed “Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke Luke 3:23-38

INTRODUCTION: *It's a Wonderful Life*¹

About a month ago, one of the most popular movies on Television was the old Jimmy Stewart classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*. Now the premise of the movie is that the main character, played by Jimmy Stewart, gets a chance to see what life would be like if he had never been born. The main point of the movie is that each person's life has an impact on everybody else's life. If they had never been born, there would be gaping holes left by their absence.

Now this “**What If**” scenario has become a tried and true formula, especially around the Christmas season. One of this year's top Christmas movies, *The Family Man*, uses a similar device. The man, played by Nicholas Cage, gets to see **what** would have happened to his life **if** he had married his high school sweetheart. Although it varies from *It's a Wonderful Life* in that the first movie he gets to see life without him, and in the second movie he gets to see his own life under different circumstances.

¹ The Introduction and theme of this message is greatly adapted from What If Jesus Had Never Been Born? by D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, pages 4-27.

Now what does this have to do with Luke 3:23-38 and even more importantly, what does this have to do with today being Sanctity of Life Sunday.

Actually, it has a lot to do with those things, I think.

First, we're now well in to chapter three of the book of Luke. We've seen all the events of the Christmas season leading up to and just after the birth of Christ. And then we took a big jump in time to when Jesus was twelve. And then we took another big jump in time and saw the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.

For all practical purposes, everything we have seen and heard up to Luke 3:23 served as the Preface to the real story. The real story, of course, being the story of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The text begins with an unusual list. It lists the genealogy of Jesus Christ, going from Jesus all the way back to Adam. Now if we started to read this list, it would go like this ...

Luke 3:23-25 ...

“Jesus was about thirty years old when He began His public ministry.

Jesus was known as the son of Joseph.

Joseph was the son of Heli.

[24] Heli was the son of Matthat.

Matthat was the son of Levi.

Levi was the son of Melki.

Melki was the son of Jannai.

Jannai was the son of Joseph.

[25] Joseph was the son of Mattathias.

Mattathias was the son of Amos.

Amos was the son of Nahum.

Nahum was the son of Esli.

Esli was the son of Naggai. ...”

And so on and so forth for another 13 verses.

Not the most dynamic reading you’re going to find in the Bible.

In fact, at first glance, it’s pretty boring.

And you get to passages like this and you can’t help but think, “Lord ... I know that this is the holy, inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God ... sufficient for all things and our only rule of faith and practice. And I’m sure, Lord, that there are some deep spiritual truths in here, but to be honest, Lord, I’m not getting any of them.”

And so you just move on.

And **that’s** a mistake.

Now, I said last week that when Luke starts to give us these lists of people, he does so because he wants us to be sure that we aren’t reading a fairy tale, but real history about real people in a real place at a real time.

This is why it is so important to realize that the Bible was written in enough detail to help us understand that it's talking about real people in real history. .

And most of the time when we read those kinds of historical details, we just move on. I mean, "who cares," it's just a bunch of dead guys from a long time ago with hard to pronounce names. Let's just move on and get to the good stuff.

But God doesn't put anything into the Bible without a good reason for it, so it really doesn't help just to "move on."

Secondly, to get back to Jimmy Stewart and *It's a Wonderful Life*, I want to take this list as a jumping off point to ask, "What if Jesus had never been born?" What if social conventions were universally adopted throughout history ... any one change in this genealogy could lead us to that question, "What if Jesus had never been born?" Now, could God override history and bring Christ into the world as we know Him know. He could have, but He didn't. God doesn't have to override history since He is Sovereign over history and controls what happens as part of His Sovereign plan. And so the events represented in this genealogy aren't historical accidents, but part of the pre-planned work of God.

But I do want to look at how God worked in that history and what that means for us today. How did that history affect us right here, right now.

However, before we jump too far into the story today, let's go over again, briefly, what this book is about.

REMINDER: *What is this book about?*

Luke is the author of this book **and** the Book of Acts, written as Volumes 1 & 2 in the story of Christ and His Church.

In these two books, and especially in this passage today, you'll see that there is an over-riding sense of the **Sovereign** plan of God at work in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. You will see that there is a constant emphasis on **Jesus** having come to be **the Savior of the World**. Everything Jesus does is designed to highlight this unique point ... **that He is the Son of God and Savior of sinners**. You will see that there's a constant emphasis on **the Gospel** as the message of New Life in Christ that changes people and offers eternal life. And finally, you will see that there is an emphasis on **Truth**.

To sum up the book, it is **the person and work of Jesus Christ** that takes center stage. It shows us the Sovereign plan of God, the Savior through whom that plan takes place, the Gospel message that explains that plan, that it is all true, and that those who place their faith in Christ can rest confidently in that plan. The Book of Luke is the story of "**Revealed Grace**."

We pick up the story at chapter three, verse 23.

We start by seeing that Jesus is ...

v. 23-38a: THE SON OF MAN ²

Luke 3:23a, *“Jesus was about thirty years old when He began His public ministry. Jesus was known as the son of Joseph.”*

This is how the genealogy starts. It start with Jesus and goes back to Adam and God. There is another genealogy found in the book of Matthew. It starts with Abraham and goes forward to Jesus. There are some significant differences between the two genealogies. There are good explanations for those differences. Matthew’s list is clearly the line of Joseph and follows the royal lineage. Luke’s list is most likely the line of Mary and follows the legal lineage.

I think that the main reason the list is here is to once again, ground the person and work of Christ in history, showing that this is not a made up story about a made up person, but real history with real people at a real place and time.

Luke wants to show Jesus’ connection to David, Abraham, and Adam. Each connection allows a point to be made about who Jesus is. The connection to David establishes His rights as royal heir, the son of David, the King of Israel. The connection to Abraham links Jesus to all the promises of God to His people. The connection to Adam demonstrates that Jesus represents all humanity.

And second, and even more important, it is here to show us that Jesus serves as the mediator for all people before God. He is the bridge, so to speak, between

² Exposition of the text is adapted from Preaching the Word: Luke, Vol. 1 by R. Kent Hughes, pages 128-129 and The NIV Application Commentary: Luke by Darrell Bock, pages 123-126.

God and man. The fact that this list extends to Adam tells us that the King of Israel is also the head of the human race. God's promise to Israel becomes our promise in Christ. Anyone who trusts in Christ becomes a child of Abraham, and an heir to the promises that God gave to Abraham.

Jesus genealogy is full of historical, Biblical figures like David, Jesse, Boaz, Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, and Noah. Some of the people walked closely with God and some didn't. Jesus represents them as much as He does us. Some of the people are well-known and some are unknown, only appearing in this list. Jesus represents both. This list makes clear that no matter who you are, what you've done, where you live, what kind of background you have ... it doesn't matter, Jesus represents you before the father as, using His favorite title for Himself, "The Son of Man." Jesus was a real person, who lived at a real time, in a real place, with a real family. He can represent us because He was one of us.

But the paradox of Christ is that He was not only the Son of Man, but He was also ...

v. 38b: THE SON OF GOD

Luke 3:38b, *"Seth was the son of Adam. Adam was the son of God."*

With all that said and done, the key point of the genealogy comes to us in the last line. The striking, central point of the genealogy is that it terminates in God. This is a one-of-a-kind ending. There is no parallel in the Old Testament or in any

ancient Hebrew texts for a genealogy to begin or end with the name of God. Luke uses this unique ending as a shout for attention. He wants us to understand that Adam is the son of God (son with a small s) in the sense that all people are children of God.

As Paul said in **Acts 17:28**, *“For in Him we live and move and exist. As one of your own poets says, ‘We are His offspring.’”* Therefore, as the first man, Adam can be referred to as ‘the son of God.’ But Jesus, the eternal Son of God (son with a capital S), has become part of the human family and its flawed sonship (flawed because of Adam’s disobedience). The great thing about this is that as Jesus exercises His perfect, eternal Sonship He is able to redeem Adam’s, and therefore our, imperfect flawed Sonship. Paul said it this way in **1 Corinthians 15:22**, *“Everyone dies because all of us are related to Adam, the first man. But all who are related to Christ, the other man, will be given new life.”*

And again in **Romans 5:17**, *“The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over us, but all who receive God's wonderful, gracious gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.”*

Adam is the son of God (small s); Jesus is the Son of God (capital S). As we saw earlier in **Luke 3:22**, God the Father said, *“You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you.”*

Jesus is the unique Son of God who can be our Savior because He lived a

sinless, perfect life. He is the Son of Man who can be our Savior because He replaces Adam as our perfect representative. He is fully God, and He is fully man. That enables Him, as a unique man in history, to serve as the Savior of Sinners.

But what if this unique Son of God, Son of Man hadn't lived?

Today is Sanctity of Life Sunday, what if His life hadn't been?

And that's not just idle speculation.

We see from His genealogy in Matthew a number of people who shouldn't have been there. Last fall, we went through the book of Ruth. Ruth and Boaz are in the list. They shouldn't be ... Ruth was from Moab, not only a Gentile, but from an enemy of Israel. Bathsheba makes the list; David's partner in adultery. Certainly not someone you would expect to be there. Rahab is there. Even though she makes the list in Hebrews 11 as a person of great faith, she was still a prostitute. Again, not someone you would choose to be an ancestor of Jesus. Tamar is there, she was raped and abused. Again, not the sort of circumstances you would hope to find in the lineage of the Messiah.

Then there is the question of first-born sons, whom you would expect to be the rightful people in Jesus lineage. But right from the start we have Seth, not Cain; Enoch, not Lamech; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau. God chooses who is in the line; if the first-born son fails, he is set aside and man of God's choosing and purpose is taken.

If one of us was choosing the lineage there are a bunch of men and women who wouldn't make it. Now you add into the mix, the 21st Century acceptance of Abortion for convenience, for social acceptance, for the hard cases of rape and incest. Tamar would be gone, right off the bat. But that's acceptable, she was raped. Rahab would be gone, who would accept the child of prostitute? Certainly, Bathsheba's children would be considered suspect, she's a candidate, if for nothing else, to protect the pure royal line of David. All of these people would easily be accepted in today's worldview as justifiable candidates to have abortions.

Not to mention Mary, an unwed pregnant teenager.

But is God's plan so easily thwarted? Not at all.

But let's leave Luke 3 for a moment and think about the hypothetical.

What if Jesus had never been born?

What gaps would be left by His absence, apart from providing salvation to mankind.

If we look at it carefully, the gaps are huge.

First, let's take a quick tour through ...

CHRIST'S IMPACT ON HISTORY

2,000 years ago Christianity was a small sect focused on an itinerant preacher who taught, healed, and performed miracles in the oppressed nation of Israel for about 3 ½ years. Today there are more than 2 Billion people who profess

faith in Him as Lord and Savior. They are found in virtually every nation on earth.

The men with power in His day are long buried and remembered only in history books. They have no followers today. No one worships them.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said, “I search in vain in history to find [anyone] similar to Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach the Gospel ... nations pass away, thrones crumble, but the Church remains.”

Despite its humble origins, the Church of Christ has made more changes for good on this earth than any other movement, force, or ideology in history. While there has certainly been some low points found in religious wars and persecutions, the high points far surpass them in impact and number.

Hospitals, a creation of the church, beginning in the Middle Ages.

Universities, a creation of the church, for Christian purposes, also began in the Middle Ages.

Education for the common people, a creation of the church.

Free enterprise and the Protestant work ethic, an outgrowth of Calvinism.

Representative Government, particularly as it is seen in the American experiment, also an outgrowth of Calvinism.

Civil liberties, the abolition of slavery, and the elevation of women, all flow from Christian principles and practices.

You can go on to the inspiration of art and music, the protection of human

sexuality, and the intrinsic value of human life, all built by Christianity.

And not often thought of, but certainly very important, the codifying and setting to writing of many of the world's languages, an outgrowth of the modern mission's movement.

But being this is Sanctity of Life Sunday, let's take a closer look at ...

CHRIST'S IMPACT ON HUMAN LIFE

About a hundred years ago, a French engineer asked his students the question, "What's the most important thing to come out of a mine?" After the students named various gems and minerals, the professor corrected them by saying, "The most important thing to come out of a mine is the miner."

Prior to the coming of Christ, human life on this planet was cheap. Even today, in those countries or cultures where Christianity has not yet penetrated, human life is still cheap.

But Jesus Christ gave life tremendous value because Christianity affirmed and strengthened the belief that man is made in God's image, therefore we possess a Sanctity based on what we are, not who we are.

Very quickly, let's look at three areas where Christianity has made an impact on the value of life.

First, let's look at the value of children.

In the ancient world, children had no value. Child sacrifice was common.

Abortion was freely practiced. Abandonment was widespread. And infanticide was not only legal, it was applauded. At the time of the Roman empire, only half of all the children born lived past the age of eight.

But then Jesus came, humbling Himself to be made man. Since that time, Christians have cherished life as sacred. In ancient Rome, Christians saved thousands of babies left to die of exposure and raised them in the faith. Today, Christians are helping thousands of pregnant women through 3,000 crisis pregnancy centers across the country, like Life Line, helping woman one at a time.

Abortion, abandonment, and infanticide disappeared where the church was established. Homes and orphanages were started to care for the children. In the 2nd Century, a letter to Diognetus described Christians of that day. It said, “They marry and have children, but they do not destroy their offspring.” These practices were finally outlawed in the 6th Century under the Christian Emperor Justinian.

Second, let’s look at the value of women.

Prior to Christian influence, women had little or no value. In most ancient cultures, the wife was the property of her husband ... period. Aristotle taught that women were somewhere between men and slaves. Plato taught that if a man was a coward, he would be reincarnated as a woman. Baby girls were abandoned in far greater numbers than boys, a practice that still exists in some Asian cultures today.

The practice of abandoning infant girls was common in China until Christian

missionaries arrived. The girls would be left out in the woods to die of exposure or be killed by wild animals. Sometimes they would just be thrown into rivers. Until Christian missionaries began visiting all the abandonment places to save these girls from sure death. The raising of girls became a primary occupation of missionaries in 19th Century China, less than 200 years ago.

The impact of William Carey and Amy Carmichael on the lives of women in India is immeasurable. Carey was instrumental in stopping the practice of infanticide, as well as stopping the common practice of women being thrown onto the funeral pyres of their husbands. Even today the pioneering of sex-selection abortions – killing unborn girls, because they're girls – started in India and China.

Even today, women are treated in many cultures as second-class or lesser-grade human beings. D. James Kennedy tells the story of being in the Middle East, and stopping to watch four men play checkers, while another man was plowing a field behind them. He had two animals yoked to the plow. One was an ox, but he couldn't tell what the other animal was until they turned the corner. It was a woman ... wife to one of the men playing checkers. Women are not valued in much of the world. Christ gave women more esteem and value than has anyone else ... ever.

Third, let's look at the value of the elderly.

In most cultures the value of the elderly is determined by the values of the

tribes or people-groups. Many Greek and Roman cultures expected the elderly to commit suicide when they got too old to take care of themselves. Other cultures simply abandoned them, set them adrift into the ocean, forced them to walk out into the wilderness, or jungles, just so they would disappear. Nursing Homes for the elderly is a Christian invention, brought back to the United States by American missionaries returning home. The hospice movement started in the church, allowing the elderly to die with dignity without being cast off or forgotten.

Now, to be honest, the care of the elderly is a particularly modern issue, as only 1% of all people lived past 65, even as recently as the beginning of the 20th Century. However, the care of the elderly is enormously expensive, and so hospitals today are having to deal with the increasing problem of “Granny-dumping,” the taking of elderly people to hospitals and just leaving them there.

So today we face the issues of legalized euthanasia and assisted suicide, all results of the quality of life ethic that holds that life must have a certain level of quality to be allowed to continue. Adolf Hitler would have heartily agreed.

We could go on ... Gladiators, slavery, cannibalism ... all existed in the world until Christianity managed to rid the world of their evils. They have, in some cases, reoccurred and have had to be purged again. If Christ had not come, we would still be fighting against them

Will Durant, a secular historian, has written the definitive survey of world

history, has this to say about the impact of Christianity on the Roman government:

“There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned or oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all trials with a fiery tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the strongest state that history has ever known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and Christ had won.”

CONCLUSION: *Inauguration of an Old Government*³

Yesterday we inaugurated a new government.

But in reality, we inaugurated an old government.

A peaceful transition of power that happens in the midst of great policy debates, philosophical differences, and political confrontations.

In many countries of the world today, that doesn't happen without the use of force and the exercise of violent power.

The American experiment still works.

And we are incredibly blessed because of it.

We live in a Republic where people are governed by laws.

What one person made the greatest contribution to the sources of American liberty, government, economics, education, and principles?

³ The Conclusion is adapted from [What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?](#) pages 59-61.

I would argue that the best candidate is the Reformer from Geneva, Switzerland named John Calvin. Calvin is best remembered for being the power of the Reformation. If Martin Luther was its preacher, John Calvin was its theologian. He's also remembered for being the principal writer of Reformed Theology, also called Calvinism, to which this church holds ... without apology. Although I think Augustine might hold claim to being the first real Reformed Theologian, certainly Calvin systematized and applied the teachings of the Bible like no one else.

Calvin considered himself merely an expositor of the teachings of Jesus.

And yet, virtually every major historian of the free world considers Calvin the father of the form of government that we hold to and which we witnessed working so well yesterday.

How can I say this?

Because the American form of government is not a pure democracy. It is a Republic, and it is copied almost directly from the form of Government in the Presbyterian Church that existed in the late 18th Century.

The American Revolution was considered at the time to be largely caused by Presbyterians. In fact, in England it was not called the American Revolution, it was called the Presbyterian Revolution. In a letter to King George III, one colonial loyalist wrote, "I fix **all** the blame for these extraordinary proceedings upon the

Presbyterians. They have been the chief and principal instruments in all of these flaming measures.”

When word of the rebellion reached England, the Prime Minister, Horace Walpole rose in Parliament and made this statement, “Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson.”

The parson, or minister, he was referring to was the Rev. John Witherspoon, president of Princeton, the only minister to have signed the Declaration of Independence, and the mentor of James Madison, the primary writer of our constitution.

At the time of the Revolution, over half of the soldiers and officers in the Revolutionary Army were Presbyterians. All of the Regular Army Colonels in the Revolution, except for one, were Presbyterian **Elders**.

Why did this happen?

Because the Presbyterian form of government destroys tyranny and monarchy in the Church. And freedom in church government has, throughout history, led to freedom in the civil government. Even King James, whom the Authorized Version of the Bible was dedicated to and is named after today, agreed with this. He said, “Presbytery agreeth with monarchy like God with the Devil.”

Every republic that exists in the world today, was produced by the influence of Presbyterianism and Calvinism.

Why did I choose to end with this?

Precisely because today is Sanctity of Life Sunday.

And once again, we who claim to be Reformed, to be Presbyterians, to be Calvinists ... are needed to bring the salt and light to places and issues and people so that those places and issues and people can be changed.

The government doesn't make laws. Men make laws. And men (and women) can be changed by the power of the Gospel of God's Grace as it is found in Jesus Christ, and only in Jesus Christ. We must be involved in the political arena, in the Right to Life arena, in the Euthanasia arena, in the arena of upholding the value of human life.

It is no stretch of the imagination to say that we live in the most blessed country on the face of the earth and in the history of the world because **Christ** has come. That alone is reason enough to challenge, confront, and change the culture in which we live.

Luke wants us to see that the Jesus story is not only about Him, but also about us. These texts **reveal** God at work; and shows us how God provides value for people even when nobody else does. God takes people who are "outsiders" and makes them "insiders" ... people who are involved in a relationship with the God of the universe. People who are called to live a life that looks to God because He has poured out His grace on those of us who have recognized that "*in Him, we live*

and move and have our being.”

Even if we haven't earned it and don't deserve it.

Because that's the essence of grace ... getting what you don't deserve.

Luke tells the story of how **Jesus revealed that grace**, died to provide it, rose again to bestow it, and will return to establish its presence over all of creation.

The church **must show** what **such grace looks like** ... starting by bringing that grace to children, and to women, and to the elderly.

Jesus is called the Great Physician because He heals people.

He heals them physically,

He heals them mentally,

He heals them socially,

He heals their souls.

And sometimes, He uses people like us to do it.

And all who agree said, “Amen.”