

Luke 3:21:4:1

The Champion We Need

Have you noticed how language evolves over time?
Often we use the word “champion” to mean “winner”
But that’s not the original meaning of the word
The original meaning of the word champion
from both the French and Latin means “one who fights on behalf of someone else

So for example,
Josie Baff recently won the Olympic Snow Board Cross Event
In a nail-biting finish where she just edged out her competitors
Now at the Olympics, Josie Baff is a champion
That is she fought for us – her country of Australia
But for the rest of the year, when Josie Baff competes in World Cup events
And gets on the podium she is a winner
Josie is competing for herself

Or take for example the AFL
We are very invested in our AFL teams
Because they represent us on the field
When Brisbane and Geelong players competed in the AFL premiership last year
They did not compete just for themselves
But they championed all their supporters in the cause of victory

And we need champions don’t we
Imagine if you or I were to compete in a high-level AFL game
We would get absolutely smashed
No, we need champions to compete for us

And we need a champion in the fiercest battles we face in our lives
The battle against sin
And the battle against death
Today in Luke’s gospel
We’re going to look at the genealogy of Jesus
And what first appears as a boring list of dead guys
Is actually the credentials of the greatest champion who ever lived
Jesus
One who fights on our behalf and wins the most serious battles

Today, we’re going to look at two points

The Context of a Champion

And The Champion we need because Jesus is like us, and not like us

Now let’s look closer at our first point

The Context of a Champion

In the Bible there are two genealogies of Jesus one at the start of Matthew’s gospel
And the one here in Luke chapter 3
And you would think that it makes sense to start an account of Jesus
With a genealogy of Jesus

Matthew seems to be taking the right approach
Start with the ancestry of Jesus before he does anything else
So then you have some understanding of how Jesus fits into the bigger picture of the Bible

But Luke's approach is different
He doesn't *start* his gospel with a genealogy
But he introduces it once the action has already started
So here you have Jesus getting baptised in verse 21
And then after his baptism,
Jesus faces temptation by Satan in the wilderness in chapter 4
And in between these two episodes
Luke plonks this genealogy
Why? It seems a bit odd to drop in this background information about Jesus
Right in the middle of the action
Why here? Why now? I think Luke has a good reason

Let's take a closer look.

Verse 21

²¹ When all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized.

As we heard from Clint last week
It's a peculiar thing that John the Baptist was baptising Jews
Because baptism was a ritual for Gentile converts to Judaism
But even more confronting
Is that this was a baptism of *repentance* for the forgiveness of sins
This is John saying to his fellow Jews
You need to get right with God because of your sin
Your birthright and heritage is not enough

But then why does Jesus need to get baptized?
It's not because of his own sin
No, Jesus doesn't need to repent
But rather his baptism represents his willingness to identify with sinners

Something clearly God approved of in this uniquely Trinitarian moment
After his baptism
As Jesus was praying the Holy Spirit descends on Him.
This is where Jesus – God the Son receives God the Spirit in the form of a dove
And is given a blessing from God the Father in verse 22
"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased"
And in this we get a hint of God's will for Jesus at the start of his public ministry
For one day Jesus is to stand in the place of sinners in a far more dramatic way
When he dies in their place on the cross for their sin
As one commentator puts it quite eloquently
"The shadow of the cross falls across the waters of the Jordan"

And after Jesus' baptism if you skip over the genealogy
And jump straight over to chapter 4 verse 1 it flows very smoothly

4 Then Jesus left the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days to be tempted by the devil.

So you have Jesus the Son of God being baptised in the place of sinners
And then immediately after, Jesus the Son of God goes into battle against Satan
To be tempted by him on behalf of sinners
You see what Luke is doing
He's framing a contest
Jesus is going to battle sin
He's going to battle Satan
He's going to battle death

This is John describing what Jesus came to do in 1 John chapter 3

⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸ The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Jesus goes into battle with Satan
Because he's the people's champion
He intends to destroy Satan's power
And so Luke frames this genealogy with these two bookends
Jesus' baptism at the start
And Jesus' temptation at the end
And therefore He sets the context of the champion - Jesus
And the genealogy in between
Is to show the identity of Jesus the champion
And his legitimacy

But let me ask you first

Do we even need a champion?

I mean the current thinking is that we are the heroes of our own story
We write our own future, our own successes
We don't need to rely on anyone other than ourselves

Lachie Neale and his family should have had the best Summer ever
He is a two-time winner of the Brownlow medal
The highest individual award that an AFL player can win
And in the last two years
He has captained his team the Brisbane Lions to two back to back premierships
Something that is very hard to do in the sport
He is the champion captain of the champion team
You could not achieve more than he has achieved in the sport
Fame, Money, Status and success and a beautiful family
This Summer, all the news in AFL has been off the field

In January, Lachie Neale made a public apology
Stating that he had let his wife Jules and his kids down
And that he took full responsibility for the breakdown of his marriage
And that he was standing down as captain.
Lachie Neale, failed as a champion

He failed his wife Jules and his kids
He failed his team and their supporters
And I can tell you AFL is brutal
When he runs out for his first game of the season next Saturday
He will cop a torrent of abuse from the Western Bulldog supporters
And I'm sure from some of the Brisbane supporters as well
What Lachie Neale did was devastating
But we should be cautious before we sink the boot in
Who of us have not failed when tempted to sin?
Who of us have not broken significant promises to those we love?
Who of us have not deeply offended God with our sin?
Lachie Neale, a failed champion, needs a champion
Someone he can turn to in his failure
Someone gracious enough to show him mercy
Someone strong enough to help him turn his life around

And what about Jules Neale?
She posted on Instagram
"I have been betrayed in the most unimaginable way,"
"All I can do now is try to heal and do what's best for my children."
Was it too much to expect her husband to champion her marriage and her family?
What do you do when you have been sinned against so deeply?
Jules Neale needs a champion who will never let her down
Whose steadfast love and promises will hold true at all times

Do we really need a champion?
You bet we do.
All of us have sinned and been sinned against
All of us have failed to live up to our own standards.
Let alone one that lives a life pleasing to God

Here is our Second Point
Jesus is the Champion we need
A champion like us
A champion not like us

There are a few differences between the genealogy in Matthew and this one in Luke
One of them is that Luke doesn't mention any women in his genealogy
Whereas Matthew mentions the names of a number of women
Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary
Does that mean that Luke looks down on women?
Well this is far from the case when you read Luke's gospel
Luke is very favourable to women
He makes a point of mentioning their interactions with Jesus
And even stating in Luke 8
that it was a group of women who financially supported the work of Jesus and the disciples
But it was customary that ancestry was patrilineal – that is following the male line
But interestingly, the names in both genealogies differ after King David
Matthew follows the royal lineage after his Son Solomon
Which gives emphasis to his father Joseph's ancestry

But one of theories of the different names in Luke's genealogy

Is that he seems to follow the biological line through David's son Nathan
Giving particular emphasis to Mary's biological ancestry

So it's possible that this is the reason why verse 23 says that Jesus was
"thought to be the son of Joseph"
because that was people's perception
but his actual father was God and his actual mother Mary

Another of the differences between the genealogies is their intended audience
Matthew starts with Abraham and he works his way forward and finishes with Jesus.
And it seems clear that his intended audience is a Jewish one
To show that the promises made to Abraham, the Jewish forefather
Are fulfilled in the coming of Jesus – the Messianic King of the Jews
But Luke starts with Jesus and then works his way right back to Adam
Which suggests his intended audience is more than a Jewish one
It's a universal Gentile or non-Jewish audience
Jesus is a descendant of Adam of which all of us are
And therefore Jesus is the Saviour of all people.

And when you look at the list of names
Given by Luke, this is a list of real people
This is a survey of the whole bible as it were
Jesus' descendants span every era of God's people

See Zerubbabel in verse 27
The leader of the Jews in the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem
And we heard of Zerubbabel when we recently studied Nehemiah

Then there's David in verse 31
Israel's greatest king and yet morally flawed due to his adultery and murder in the cover up
Let alone the chaos of his children who raped, and killed each other
And sought to overthrow their father
And then if you go further back before the kings
in the time of the Judges

You get Boaz in verse 32
Whom we read of in the book of Ruth
The dignified Kinsman Redeemer of the foreigner Ruth the Moabitess
Signalling the type of redeemer Christ Jesus will one day be
in bringing in outsiders to his kingdom

And then further back in time in verse 34
You get the patriarchs of Israel - Jacob, Isaac and Abraham
Whom God plucked out of obscurity and made tremendous promises to
That one day through Abraham the whole world would be blessed
And we see this promise fulfilled in his offspring Jesus

And even further back you get Noah in verse 36
Whom God saved from the flood of judgement against the sin of the world
Perhaps the earliest display of God's severe judgement for sin
And yet his mercy to those who call on Him

And then finally in verse 38,
Luke takes us back to Jesus' original ancestor Adam
And here's the key verse of this genealogy
Verse 38
Son of Adam, Son of God
Here is the identity of Jesus our champion
He is the son of Adam, truly human
He shares in our humanity
Flesh and blood like anyone of us
He knows pain firsthand
He feels grief and loneliness
He is subject to hunger and exhaustion
He experienced temptation just like any of us
Because this champion is like us.
And that matters more than we think

Reflecting on the cross of Jesus
This is what the author of Hebrews said
¹⁴ Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that he does not reach out to help angels, but to help Abraham's offspring.

Only one *like us* could stand in the place of sinners
Only one *like us* could die our death
Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as our substitute only makes sense if he is like us
Only one *like us* could take on the power of Satan
One one *like us* could offer us hope in the face of death

The author of Hebrews goes on to say:
¹⁷ Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

I find it incredibly comforting to know
That the one interceding between me and God
The one who represents me as my champion - is *like me* in every way.
Jesus knows the human condition
He knows our frailty
He knows our fears,
He knows our doubts and our insecurities
He knows our temptations
And our desperate need for help when we fall into sin
Because he is a champion like us

Steven Bradbury is Australia's favourite Winter Olympic Gold Medallist
And that's because he won gold due to all the other competitors falling over in the final
But that was the case also in the semi-final where competitors in his heat also fell over
His is the classic underdog story
But what you might not know about Steve Bradbury

Is that even though he was not blessed with raw speed on the short track
he worked very hard over a long career
And all this after a near fatal injury where an ice skate cut through his right thigh
and he lost 4 litres of blood
Bradbury competed in three Olympics and won a bronze medal in his first Olympics
Before winning the gold medal and retiring
Steve Bradbury is the people's champion
He gets us – he is one of us – he too is human – he bleeds
And we relate to him, don't we?

But if your life depended on it?
Would you want Steve Bradbury to race for you?
If you had the choice of which champion would compete for your life
Would you choose Steve Bradbury?
No I don't think you would
As much as you like him
As much as he gets you
You would choose someone who wasn't like you
I know who I would choose

I would choose this guy
Michael Phelps – the greatest swimmer in history
He competed in four Olympics
He won 28 Olympic medals and 23 of them were gold medals
Every single time he entered the pool and competed in a race
You felt he would win it and set an Olympic or World record
If my life was on the line
I would want Michael Phelps to be my champion because he's not like us
He's a freak.

And I don't know how to say this politely but Jesus is a freak too.
As much as Jesus is like us
He's a champion *not like us*.
We saw it in his baptism
He is God's beloved Son
Filled with the Spirit of God
He has a unique relationship with God
Yes he might well be the Son of Adam
But Luke is under no false impression that Jesus is also the Son of God
And as such only he can face Satan and win
Only he can break the power of sin
Only he can free us from the slavery of death
Luke declares the identity of Jesus as Son of Adam, Son of God
Then he goes immediately to Jesus being tempted by Satan
And I think this is meant to remind us of Genesis 3
Where Adam was tempted by Satan in the form of the serpent
And He failed that test and therefore sin and death entered our world

But Jesus now steps up as our champion and takes on Satan
A better Adam because he is the son of God
Not only does he take on Satan in the wilderness

But he takes on Satan on the cross
And he wins decisively
Instead of sin and death being brought to many in the first Adam
The better Adam, Jesus - brings grace and life to many

Here is the apostle Paul reflecting on this in Romans 5

¹⁴ Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. ¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

There is this fascination we have of knowing our ancestry
Websites like ancestry.com hold out the promise
That if we understand the stories of those in our past
We will better understand our legacy and the way we should live today
Chinese people particularly value genealogies
In the May family we have an ancestor family book that goes back for hundreds of years
And me and my brother's names have been added on as part of the twentieth generation
And our sons have been added as the twenty first generation
Patrilineal like that of Jesus – only the males
I have apologised to my daughters for this
And this ancestor book dates back 500 years to the Ming Dynasty
As fascinating as it would be to learn about those in my past
Two things are true of all the names of my ancestors
They were all sinners and all of them died
None of them are able to help me when I face sin and death
Because they are just like me.

We need a champion who is like us but not like us
And the answer lies not in my genealogy but in the identity of Jesus

This is Hebrews chapter 4

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are,

A champion like us.
He knows our flaws and our frailty
When no one else understands your weakness, Jesus does
But here's the crucial difference

Yet without sin.

A champion not like us
We succumb to temptation
We sin but Jesus doesn't
Every single time Jesus was tempted he did not sin
Every time he could have broken a promise he didn't
Every time he could have been self-serving and given to rage and jealousy and lust
He chose gentleness and love and a sacrificial commitment
Every time he could have disobeyed his Father, he chose obedience to Him

Verse 16

¹⁶ Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.

Here is your champion Jesus
Seek His help in your need and rely on him
Call on Jesus and he will meet you even in the ruins of your sin
When you fail seek His forgiveness and he will forgive you
We need a champion and he is here for us to rely on
So approach the throne of grace with boldness
If you have never prayed before
Call on God and ask Him to reveal Jesus to you
That you might know the mercy and grace that he offers to you

But the greatest champions provide an example for us to follow
Ash Barty is our most recent Australian Tennis Champion
Having won three grand slam titles and an Olympic medal
She is the second indigenous player to have achieved such honours
Her champion was Evonne Goolagong Cawley
The first indigenous player to have scaled the heights of tennis
Having also achieved the number one rank in the world
Goolagong Cawley won seven grand slam titles
They met when Barty was just 15
And Cawley became her mentor and friend
The example that Barty chose to emulate
Ash Barty said of her hero
“If I could be half the person that Evonne is, I’d be a very happy person”
In a special moment, Evonne Goolagong Cawley presented
The Australian Open trophy to Ash Barty
And not long after Ash Barty retired from tennis with the number one ranking
She finished so well

Jesus our champion is also our example
The one we are to imitate
The one who inspires us to say no to sin as he did
To endure the pain of suffering and not to give into temptation
To finish well just as he did
Let me finish with these verses from Hebrews chapter 12
Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Imagine one day, receiving the crown of glory from our champion
Our example, our friend
With the words “well done, good and faithful servant”
This is your champion who is like us and not like us
Rely on him
And follow his example