The Biblical Unitarian Podcast - by Dustin Smith, PhD

Episode 367–"Jesus' Sonship in Matthew (Part 1)"

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Introduction

This week's episode will look at the theme of sonship in the Gospel according to Matthew.

1. **Jesus' Sonship in the Temptation Narrative**
    a. *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* (Matt 4:1-4)
        i. Comes immediately after Jesus was baptized
            1. Voice from heaven announces, "This is my Son"
                a. Voice is the Father

b. Jesus is baptized and publicly anointed in a coronation ceremony, being installed as the royal son of God.

2. In the Old Testament, the title "son of God" applied to both the nation as a whole and to the nation's royal representative, the king.
    a. Nation
        i. *Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says Yahweh, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me.*" (Exod 4:22-23)
        ii. *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son*. (Hos 11:1)
            1. Matthew has already alerted his readers that Jesus, the individual, represents the nation with a citation of Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15
    b. Israelite king
        i. *I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have become your father'* (Psa 2:7)
        ii. *I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me* (2 Sam 7:14)
    c. So, there is a connection between son of God as a reference to the children of Israel and son of God as a reference to Israel's royal representative, the anointed king, the Christ. Matthew has already alerted his readers to this connection, which was already present in the Hebrew Bible.

ii. The Devil tempts Jesus to turn some stones into bread.
    1. Jesus responds with a quotation from Deut 8:3
        a. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh.
            i. Throughout this passage, the verbs are directed to a second-person singular object:
                1. "He humbled you"
                2. "Let you be hungry"
                3. "Make you understand"
                4. *Ha adam 2x*
                    a. LXX has *anthropos*
                    b. Matthew has *anthropos*

c. Jesus quotes a verse and applies it to himself, a verse that describes a human being who is obediently relying on every word of Yahweh.

2. The context of Deut 8:3 is the nation of Israel being tested in the wilderness.

b. "*The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that Yahweh swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that Yahweh your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of Yahweh. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, Yahweh your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of Yahweh your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him*. (Deut 8:1-6)

i. Parallels

1. Israel, the son of God, was in the wilderness
    a. Jesus, the son of God, was in the wilderness
2. Israel was tested for a period of 40 years
    a. Jesus was tested for a period of 40 days
3. Israel's temptation was set in a context involving hunger
    a. Jesus' temptation was also in a context involving hunger
4. Israel's temptations were given to see if they would be obedient
    a. Jesus' temptation tests his obedience
5. Yahweh is the god of Israel
    a. The God of Jesus, therefore, is Yahweh.

ii. Jesus is effectively reliving the temptations of his Israelite ancestors, and he is doing so as a genuine human being who is obediently relying on every word out of the mouth of Yahweh.

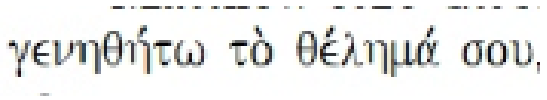
2. Sonship as Taught in the Sermon on the Mount

a. "*Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth*. (Matt 5:5)

i. To speak of an inheritance is to talk about what a father passes unto his sons.

1. Who would give this land? The Father, God.

b. "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*. (Matt 5:9)
    i. God is their Father
        1. "*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*. (Matt 5:16)
        2. "*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven* (Matt 5:44-45)
c. "*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me*. (Matt 5:10-11)
    i. V10, for the sake of righteousness
    ii. V11 for the sake of Jesus
        1. Righteousness, the standard of new covenant living and membership for the sons of God, is defined by Jesus himself, the royal son of God
            a. Jesus mediates sonship in the new covenant
d. The disciples are ideal sons of God by obeying the commands of God spoken through Jesus, the messianic and royal son of God.
    i. Both Jesus and his disciples bear the title of son of God as a designation for loyal, faithful, and obedient sons.
e. "*Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name*. (Matt 6:9)
    i. “Our” indicates Jesus and his disciples; they are all sons, and they share the same Father.
        1. Jesus is not a son of God in the same sense as his disciples. He is the mediator of the new covenant and the messianic king.
            a. Jesus was born the son of God, and he was crowned son of God at his baptism.
            b. The disciples have their sonship mediated through Jesus and their observance of his words and commands.
f. "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter*. (Matt 7:21)
    i. "*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will*." (Matt 26:39)
    ii. "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." (Matt 26:42)
        1. Direct quote from Matt 6:10

a. 

In conclusion, Matthew's Gospel:

1. Jesus is the anointed son of God, the Messiah, who succeeds in the wilderness temptation where his Israelite ancestors failed.
2. In the midst of his temptation, Jesus cites a passage from Deut 8:3 in order to refer to him as a human being who faithfully obeys every word that comes out of the mouth of Yahweh.
3. Jesus summons his disciples and calls them to act in a way deserving of the title "son of God." This title implies one who is obedient to the covenant, and in the case of the Sermon on the Mount, these teachings are new covenant teachings/
4. As the royal son of God, Jesus mediates sonship to his followers when they obey his teachings.
5. Jesus' Father, Yahweh, is the same Father that his disciples have.
6. Matthew's christology illustrates Jesus as the human son of God, one who defines Yahweh as the Father alone.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode!

Join us next week as we continue to explore the Gospel of Matthew and the many ways in which it defines sonship in terms of one who is obedient to their Father.

Please look forward to our next episode.

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