

## VOICES FROM THE BALCONY

**Luke 3:21–38**

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Luke 3:21–38 (NIV)

“When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are My Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’ Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki...” I’ll pass on the temptation to read all seventy-seven names in this list. I like lists of names. I think if you were to ask Elmadam what his favorite verse in the Bible was, he would not say John 3:16. He would say, “Luke 3:28. That’s where my name is.” But I know that perhaps going through this list of names is not the most edifying thing you could do today. So we’ll simply come to the last names. “... the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.”

I’ve had a recent experience with stethoscopes. A doctor or nurse uses these to listen to your heartbeat and see how the lungs are doing. I somehow think that encountering God’s Word is like having a stereoscope in your hands to listen to the spiritual beat in your life. Whatever part of God’s Word I’m in, I try to see how it is relevant to me and what it is saying to me about my life and about my walk with God. In this sense, the passage of Scripture today becomes, in our hands, a stereoscope to listen more deeply to the insides of us and what God is doing within.

There are three parts to this passage today. One is the meaning of Jesus’ baptism. The second has to do with His private years at Nazareth and the beginning of His public ministry at the age of

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

thirty. The third part of the passage has to do with the genealogy. We'll look at each of these in turn.

The baptism of Jesus is suggesting several things in our own life.

#### **I. One is that the baptism of Jesus tells us that there is a time for us to come out of our privacy.**

Jesus, up to the age of thirty, had a private life. He lived as a son and as an elder brother at Nazareth. We know His trade to be that of a carpenter. We know that He went to the synagogue regularly on the Sabbath. He was in all respects a normal private citizen. At His baptism, that all ends. For hereafter, He is to be in public ministry. Jesus cannot accomplish the mission God sent Him to accomplish by remaining in privacy at Nazareth. He had to declare Himself. He had to come out publicly. It's interesting that when He left the earth and left the hundred and twenty at the prayer meeting in Jerusalem, that if His mission through them was to be effective, they also had to come out of the privacy of the Upper Room, out of the privacy of their relationship with Him and into the public arena of service and sharing the good news.

It is always the case, if God's work is to be done in this world, that we each as individual believers have to come out of our privacy. Sometimes the coming out of our privacy may seem before us a costly thing. We realize that involves a re-scrambling of priorities and schedules and time commitments.

As I look at this passage today and the whole issue of coming out of privacy, my mind goes back to a time, about eighteen years ago, after Jewel and I were first married; enjoying our first year of marriage together. I was asked to teach a Bible course in an interdenominational fellowship group at a local Methodist church in Springfield, Missouri. There were about fifteen in the class that first evening and after the class, one of the ladies in the group came to me. She was in her

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

late twenties. She had waited until everyone else in the room had left. Then she said to me, “I want to ask you a personal question. I want you to answer it directly with your gut feelings and not answer it like a preacher would or the way you think you’re supposed to answer it. Just tell me what the answer is from your point of view. Who is Jesus Christ?” I responded to her, “What I say to you is going to sound like what you’d expect from a minister but my understanding and my deep belief in Jesus Christ is that He is God’s Son who came to earth, lived a sinless life, died for our sins, physically rose again from the dead, was caught up into heaven, and is returning for those who believe in Him and to judge the earth.” She said, “I thought you’d probably say something like that.”

It turned out that Mary had a MA degree in religion and philosophy from a local college. She was the daughter of a dean of a local college. She was the women’s leader of her denomination, a liberal Protestant denomination in the state of Missouri. She, at this point in life in her late twenties, was scrambling around, wondering if some of this stuff in the Bible might be true. She had had a kind of religiosity but it had proven to be non-satisfying, so she was asking me, who is Jesus?

I said, “Mary, if you’ll stay with me in this course, an inductive study in the Gospel of Mark, I believe that you’ll be able to see better who He is by listening to a first-century witness.” So Mary stayed in the class. But it was more than the class. Mary would come over to our apartment on the campus of the college. She would, maybe a couple nights a week, come over and have a list of questions all worked out. Sometimes the list would go on for three or four pages—handwritten questions about the Bible and about God. She had more questions than I had answers for. We would talk and at about ten, we would think, “Now is the time. Mary’s been here three hours.” We almost began to dread those times with Mary, because they became so

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

draining and because she had so many questions; and because it didn't seem like she would ever reach a decision. All the while, we were being forced out of our privacy; forced out of the privacy of our first year of marriage and out of the privacy of Jewel's pregnancy with Evangeline. Forced, because of our concern for Mary...to spend time with her. Wanting to do it out of Christian love but sometimes doing it out of Christian duty.

Finally, after about six months of this, there came a time when in our little living room I said to Mary, "I have in the course of these months taught you everything I know, answered every question I know how to answer or directed you to material if I didn't have the answer. Now it's time for you to make up your mind and to answer the question you asked me the first evening I met you. Who is Jesus of Nazareth?" She said, "Give me another few days to think about it and I'll get back to you."

She came to our home several days later in the evening, a quiet smile of serenity on her face. But she had her notebook, as always, and she handed that to me. In it was about a three or four page essay; she had written out her understanding of who Jesus was and she was confessing Him as her Lord and Savior. It was one of the most unusual conversations I had ever seen. It was so rational, so intellectual; and my Pentecostal roots said there had to be something more than writing it out on a sheet of paper. So we knelt and prayed and in our living room, she came to know the Lord, later became filled with the Spirit, much later, able to lead her husband to the Lord, able to raise their two children to know the Lord; and today is just finishing up a graduate degree in counseling and is wanting and preparing to train ministers in counseling ministry and techniques.

We were in Springfield, Missouri, this last August and one of the highlights for me was seeing Mary—Mary with her perpetual notebook in her hand, still learning. Mary, who forced us to

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

come out of our privacy and learn that the greatest thing we can do as Christians is spend time sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

The only way that the kingdom of God will ever be built is if each one of us will feel called to give up leisure and personal time and share God and His Word. If we're going to see the Church of Jesus Christ built, we must have a sense of stepping out of our privacy into an arena of responsibility, whether that is being involved in visitation or teaching a Sunday School class or leading a small group or extending ourselves in some way in a regular fashion to others. Jesus fulfilled God's will for His life as He came out of privacy.

### **II. A second thing about Jesus' baptism which is instructive to note: His baptism shows us that there is a time to identify with what is right.**

John the Baptist had been out there, ministering in the wilderness. He was in political danger and the religious leadership wasn't all that enamored of him. But Jesus knew that it was important for Him to identify with John and, by being baptized by him, put His seal of approval upon this prophet's ministry. There are times too when God calls us, as His followers, to step out and identify with those people and those ministries which are right. And to put our presence on the line and our endorsement on the line and even our finances on the line.

One of my very favorite people—who I don't know personally but admire his work from a distance—is Don Wildman, the Methodist minister from Mississippi, who founded the National Crusade for Decency. He became aware of the tremendous amount of garbage that is in the television and movie industry and he's trying to do something about it; sort of a little David out there with big Goliath. As I have followed him—taking on the networks, for example, and their failure to portray Christians as Christians in this society; anytime, on national television, you see a Christian or a minister depicted, you will generally see that person depicted as some sort of

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

sex-starved individual or some kind of psychotic nut—Don Wildman has been out there calling attention to that issue and to the pornography in the day. I don't know if you are aware of it, but the paper recently carried the story that NBC had temporarily halted all religious advertising.

They've since allowed it to happen again. But the reason why they halted it is that the new Bible called *The Book*, the paperback, had asked for advertising. They were going to pay for

it...willing to pay for it; but NBC said, "The advertisers are making so many claims about this book and what it can do for people, we don't know if that's valid." So they halted all religious advertising for a while.

It's interesting...those same people did not halt all liquor advertising, because they wanted to ascertain whether its claims were right or not. It's been demonstrated through serious studies by independent non-Christian scholars that there's definitely a link between teenage alcoholism and the showing of commercials on television for liquor, which presented in a positive light a creative and innocent sort of ambiance or life-setting.

Don Wildman is out there in the wilderness, calling attention to these things. I realized, as I was preparing for this service, that while I greatly admire him, I've never identified with him. I've never publicly said, "This guy's okay." I've never sat down and wrote him out a check. I better identify with what's good and what's right.

I realize that we can't identify with everything; but we need to find that which we can identify with and can do it practically. Some of you, a few weeks ago for the first time, identified with missions through a first-time missionary commitment in the church. Others of you are identifying with famine relief. Others of you are out walking on picket lines at the local abortion clinics. We cannot do everything, but we must do something. We need to also identify with the Church of Jesus Christ. Many persons stay away from church membership or regular volunteer

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

commitment because of a decision not to be involved, not to identify too tightly, to kind of hang loose.

But Jesus identified with John and showed, through His presence, that He backed him. And Jesus not only identified with him, but He identified with us, showing, in baptism, that the weight of our own sin and guilt was upon Him and He needed to be washed. He identified by providing us a role model that we too should be baptized.

So there is a time to come out of privacy. There's a time to identify with that which is right.

### **III. Jesus' baptism also shows us that there is a time to pray at life's critical junctures.**

Jesus, at His baptism, is found praying prior to the Holy Spirit's coming upon Him. If you look through the Gospels, you'll see so many occasions when Jesus was praying. You'll especially find Him praying at key moments such as at His baptism, prior to His first preaching tour of Galilee, prior to the selection of His disciples, the Twelve; when He spent all night in prayer; at His transfiguration, prior to the cross, while He prayed at Gethsemane. At the major decision moments of His life, He set aside special extraordinary time to pray.

There are young people here in this audience that are facing major life decisions. Make those decisions saturated with intense times of prayer. Others of you are making business decisions and real estate decisions and career decisions and decisions about family members and need to really be in a context of prayer.

I received the most delightful letter this week; I think the most thrilling missionary letter I've ever received in my life. It was from Tom Mutzio, a ten-page single-spaced typewritten letter. Unless you think Tom is wasting his time out there as a missionary by writing me a ten page, single spaced letter, it was a letter sent by mimeograph to people who stand with him and support him in prayer. Tom, in the month of October, was in China, traveling like a Chinese rather than a

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

western tourist through China. He got back to our old home, which was in nowhereville. I think, probably, Tom was the first Caucasian to step foot there since 1949 when we left there. He was recounting some of the tremendous spiritual experiences and linkages he had on this trip with house church leaders all over China. He was on the train for over two hundred and forty hours in this particular three-week period. He linked with people through his network of correspondence that he'd developed through the years, they traveled with him and they would talk and he would witness to them. These are non-Christian pen-pals that he has. He speaks, reads and writes Chinese fluently. Tom was saying, though, that because of the spiritual and physical rigors of this trip, he had determined to set aside a week of prayer and fasting prior to his going. One of the things that he believed, in regard to this trip and why it was so successful, was that he had really saturated that trip with prayer and people like myself stateside had promised to pray for him everyday that he was on this trip and sustain him.

It is in juncture moments of our life, critical moments, that we especially need to have saturation praying, an awareness of our need for God. Jesus shows us at His baptism. And, of course, we need the ever-present supply of prayer in our life.

I ran across a little story this week that I love. It's from Pastor David of the Presbyterian church in Pennsylvania. He tells the story of a devout Christian who had a cat and used to spend several minutes each day in prayer and meditation in his bedroom. He'd read a portion of Scripture and a devotional book and follow that by prayer. He came to enjoy that time so much that his time of devotion and prayer got longer and longer and more intense. And even as he cherished this quiet time in his bedroom, his cat began to enjoy it as well. She would cozy up to him and purr very loudly, rub her furry body against his leg. This interrupted his prayer time—nothing like trying to pray and hearing a cat purring. So he put a collar around the cat's neck and tied her to the

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

bedpost whenever he wanted to be undisturbed while at prayer. This didn't seem to upset the cat at all and it really helped him with his prayer time so that he could pray without interruption.

Years went by and the daughter of this devout Christian had noted how much his devotional time had meant to him. When she began to establish some routines and patterns in her own family living, she decided that she would do as her father had done. So, dutifully, she too tied her cat to the bedpost and then proceeded to have her devotions. But time moved faster in her generation. And she couldn't spend as much time in prayer as did her father.

The day came when her son grew up. He wanted to make sure that he preserved some of the family traditions, especially those that had meant so much to his mother and to his grandfather. But the pace of life had quickened all the more and there simply wasn't any time for elaborate devotional proceedings. So he skipped the time of meditation and Bible reading and prayer altogether. But in order to carry on the religious tradition each day, while he was dressing, he tied the family cat to the bedpost. That's what you call a vestigial remain of devotional life.

A need for prayer—Jesus shows us that at His baptism.

#### **IV. He also shows us at His baptism that there is a time when God affirms His own.**

We have, in this passage, a very explicit reference to God as trinity; for the Son is baptized, the Spirit descends, and the voice of the Father speaks. The voice of the Father speaks audibly three times in Jesus' ministry: at His baptism, which signifies approval of the quiet years at Nazareth; the voice of the Father comes again at Jesus' transfiguration, where on the mountain, Jesus has just spent time talking with Moses and Elijah about His approaching exodus or crucifixion in Jerusalem. The third time the heavenly voice speaks is in John 12, where Jesus talks about the necessity of His own death as a seed that is being sown in the ground that it might have a later harvest and He is saying, "Father, save me from this hour but glorify Your name." And the voice

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

from heaven speaks when Jesus is asking to be saved from the hour of His crucifixion and says, “I have glorified Your name, and I will glorify it again.”

What is striking about the Gospel record is, in the three times of Jesus’ earthly ministry, where the voice from heaven comes—at the beginning of His ministry, at the middle of His ministry and at the end of His ministry, each time that voice comes, it is in relationship to Jesus contemplating His mission as the Lamb of God. At the baptism, He is taking on the burden of sin, which would lead Him to the cross. At the transfiguration, He is talking about His death. In John 12, He is facing the cross. Each time He is in the throes of facing the cross, the voice of the Father says, “I’m well pleased with you, for I have glorified Your name.”

Which, by the way, is God’s pattern for reminding us, through His Word—in the times that we are lowest or the times we are suffering most in life—of our sonship or our daughtership with God. We may not have all the explanation for why something is happening or the way it is happening, but we can be secure in the relationship and secure with God’s presence encouraging us directly.

So this passage of Scripture on His baptism is telling us that there is a time to come out of our privacy, a time to identify with what is right, a time to pray at life’s critical junctures and a time to be affirmed.

This passage of Scripture also points us past the baptism to the moment when Jesus begins His public ministry at the age of thirty. Luke is the only Gospel writer to tell us what age Jesus began His public ministry at.

Dave Reed once preached a sermon and wrote a book entitled *Is God Over Thirty?* He based it on this text, linked together with the Gospel of John, where Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” Reed says that this is a direct contradiction to all those who think of God as the

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

grand old man who's barely tottering along with His white hair and snowy beard managing to keep the cosmos barely running. But Jesus, at thirty years of age, is physically in the strapping strength of young manhood when He says, "When you look at Me you've looked at God."

That'll really scramble your ideas about God when you think of Jesus saying, "He who has seen Me, at the age of thirty, has seen God."

This verse had a very special place in my life when I was sixteen years of age, because I felt called to the ministry and I was one of the last young people, perhaps, in Pentecostal circles that was told not to go to school because the Lord would come before you got through. Here I was at sixteen years of age, facing four years of college and three years in seminary, and telling people about that, and some people would kindly take me aside and say, "It's important that you get out now because, by the time you finish school, the Lord will come and you'll never get a chance to finish." I didn't know how to answer these people who were well meaning. Isn't it wonderful... all the people who give us advice in life and mean well that are totally wrong? The only thing I could think of to myself—and I never said this to them because it wasn't my intention to try to get into arguments with anybody—was, "If Jesus could wait until He was thirty to begin His public ministry, George Wood can wait until he is twenty-four."

And Jesus did wait until he was thirty. Why did He wait? He waited that He might fulfill with utmost faithfulness the more limited tasks of life. He waited that He might demonstrate His principle that, if you're faithful over a little, He'll make you faithful over much. He was faithful as a son. He was faithful as an elder brother. He was faithful as a carpenter. He was faithful as a synagogue member. He was faithful in those little responsibilities of life. And having proved faithfulness in those areas, He was ready now to enter into the significant greater days of His ministry.

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

I've met Christians from time to time who keep thinking about doing something great for God and have never done anything little for God. If you want to do something great for God, do something little for God, and do it well and keep doing it until He gives you something greater to do.

Jesus also waited until He was thirty that He might fully identify with us as a human being, that He might know the struggles and the trials of life that we go through. By the age of thirty, He would have faced the major temptations of life.

Then Jesus waited that He might fully live according to His own teachings. He would, in the Sermon on the Mount and other circumstances, give practical teaching about how to live. And He lived out His teaching before He gave it.

William Barclay tells about the family life of the Russian writer Tolstoy who gave us *War and Peace*. Tolstoy was a man who talked a lot about living the way of love. But here's what his wife wrote about him, "There is so little genuine warmth about him. His kindness doesn't come from the heart, but merely from his principles. His biographies will tell about how he helped the laborers carry buckets of water, but no one will ever know that he never gave his wife a rest and never, in all these thirty-two years, gave his child a drink of water or spent five minutes by his bedside to give me a chance to rest a little from all my labors." She was not exactly what you would call your "happily married wife." Her complaint was that he didn't live what he was saying he represented.

Jesus came to us, not saying, "Do as I say," but instead, "Do as I do." And those thirty years in quietness and in privacy allowed Him to live out His teaching.

So we have the baptism of Jesus, the thirty years of His private life coming to an end. And then, in this passage which we have read today, there is a description of Jesus' genealogy.

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

We could spend quite a bit of time, if you're interested, in technical matters, dealing with the genealogy in Luke. It's an absolute goldmine for people who like to wrap themselves up in technical studies; and especially when you compare Matthew's genealogy with Luke's genealogy. Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy. Luke's genealogy doesn't come until chapter three—and it's placed between the baptism and the temptation. Matthew begins by working with Abraham and going down to Jesus. But Luke begins by starting with Jesus and working backward, past Abraham, all the way to Adam. Matthew indicates that the grandfather of Jesus is Jacob. Luke indicates that the grandfather of Jesus is Heli. Between King David and Jacob, and King David and Heli, the lists are totally different, which has sent scholars a buzz, trying to figure out if Luke is giving us the genealogy of Mary and Joseph, the genealogy of Jacob or of a Levite marriage—when Jacob, the grandfather, died without a child, his widow was married to Heli, and their child carried on the genetic line; whereas Jacob's line carried on the technical line. These things get rather complicated, and they're very, very interesting, if not all that edifying.

Matthew's genealogy has forty-two generations with forty-one names. Luke's genealogy has seventy-seven names. All those details aside, Luke's purpose is to show Jesus as belonging to humanity, so he goes back to Adam. Whereas, Matthew was writing to show that Jesus was king of the Jews and only goes back to Abraham, to show the linkage with the one who is at the source roots of Israel's faith—Abraham.

The genealogy attests to the beginning of the human race through Adam. And therefore, flies in the face of humanistic concepts that emerged one day from the muck of the swamp and suddenly found himself as an animal, thinking like a human. The evolutionary view of man differs from the biblical view because the evolutionary view holds that man started low; whereas the biblical

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

view says that man started high. The evolutionary view says man reached for the heights. The biblical view says man crashed, because of sin, to the depths. And the evolutionary view says man may ultimately, indeed, fall to the depths and destroy himself. And the biblical view says the man who started high and fell to the depths can be raised again by God back to the heights. In Jesus we find the family member who has come to restore the line of Adam to being the sons and the daughters of God.

Looking at Jesus' family tree reminds us, perhaps, of our own family tree and our inability to trace ourselves very far. In fact, I never really knew my grandparents. Three of my grandparents were dead before I was born, and my paternal grandmother died in my first five or six years. So I never knew them. But I know that our family goes back eight generations in America. After the eighth generation I lose it over there in Europe somewhere. Maybe you can't trace your generations back forty-two names or seventy-seven, or whatever. There is a point where we run out; but the people you can trace have had an influence on your life for good or for bad.

A Baptist minister, Carlisle Marnie, preached a sermon about the fact that all of us are shaped by our genealogy, people who—he said—are either “in our cellar” or “in our balcony.” He said the cellar influence is primarily put forward for us by Freud, who said that there are people who are in our background that are always giving us the terrible things of life, reminding us of our weaknesses and failures. Our need to come to grips with the people in the cellar that are dragging us down are to go through lengthy psychoanalysis. And maybe there were people who were in the cellar in your background, people who abused you or misused you or abused you with language who told you things like, “You are such an ugly person. Who would ever want to marry you?” So you grew up scared, thinking yourself ugly when you were beautiful. Unless you think that doesn't happen to people...let me say that is a verbatim line, a member of this congregation

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

**Luke 3:21–38**

told me they were called that all their growing up years, “You are so ugly! Who would want to marry you?” to a beautiful person. Or, “You’re stupid.” We might have had a person say, “You can never do anything right. What’s the matter with you? I’m so sorry you were ever born. You’ve been nothing but trouble since the day you came. You give me nothing but trouble.” The negative influences in the cellar. We have these in our life—people who, through their negativity, pulled us down.

But we also have people in the balcony. People in our family line—living or dead—family members or friends who are yelling down to encourage us and tell us who we really are and saying to us—not like the people in the cellar who are saying, “Come down lower”—they are saying up on the balcony, “Come up higher.” If we listen to the voices in the cellar, we’re going to come into ruin. Perhaps the only way we can deal with these voices in the cellar is to treat other people like we were a person in the balcony. It is in freeing others, many times, that we become free ourselves.

Jesus had this kind of phenomenon in His family background. There were people in His family line that had failed miserably. There was even, in His own ministry, His brothers and sisters who one day came to take Him away and bring Him into retirement because they feared He was beside Himself. But He also had the voices in the balcony, the influence of godly Joseph and the influence of his mother, Mary, and the influence of His heavenly Father, who was saying to Him, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22, NIV). Hebrews 12 tells us that we are surrounded by a great stadium full of witnesses that cheer us in the race of life, that are saying to us “Be encouraged. Be of good cheer.”

We need to forgive the people who have been in the cellar of our life if we are to ever be free of them. For, as long as we remain in bitterness and hatred toward them, their chains reach out to

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

### **Luke 3:21–38**

enslave us. It is only as we forgive them and realize that, had they been “clothed and in their right mind” (the words used of the demoniac that Jesus set free in the Gospels), had they really been clothed and in their right mind—the mind of Jesus—they would never have said or done to us what they did. As we forgive them and recognize that God is always calling to us from the balcony, “Fear not, I am with you. I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Maybe there’s been someone in the basement of your life who has left you and forsaken you and practically (you feel) destroyed you and your self-confidence and worth. The Lord is saying, from His balcony, “I will never leave you nor forsake you. I am with you always. Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. Peace I give to you. I go to prepare a place so, where I am, you may be also.” The voice of God speaking to us. All through the Gospels, we’re continually told to consider the love of God toward us.

In looking at this little message from the life of Jesus, we ask some kind of questions in review, and questions of application.

Is the Lord laying His finger on your life or putting His stethoscope to your being and calling you out of privacy to greater involvement in service with Him, saying, “Get your life on the line for Me”?

Is He calling you to identify with what is right? Is He calling you out of the sense of ambivalence, out of the sense of simply observing the passing scene and observing the church and observing those who are in the battle for truth and right? Is He calling you out of being an observer to being an active participant and identifying with what He’s doing in the world today?

Is He calling you to a time of intense prayer because your life needs to be prepared and made strong through prayer?

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

**Luke 3:21–38**

Is He calling you through this message to get rid of the voices in the basement and listen to the voices in the balcony and be encouraged and be of good cheer, for He is with you?

If this Word of Scripture can be a stethoscope to our lives today and we can hear God speaking to us through these questions, we will have made a great gain in our lives.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Father, we thank You for Your Word, which is meant to help us, to correct us, to encourage us and to strengthen us. We take a moment, Lord, to pray for all the people who are in this sanctuary today. To pray for those whom You are calling out of privacy into responsibility. That, Lord, we'll hear gladly Your call: "Come follow Me. I will make you to become." And, Lord, that we'll hear Your call to identify with what is right and never be content with the Christian experience which allows us to sit passively on the sidelines and not be involved in Your work on earth. Call each one of us to prayer. Because we are so needy of communing with You in our life and feeling the support that You give us in prayer. And, Lord, for those who come here today with strong voices from the basement in their life, strong hurts that are from others who said the most mean and disgusting and hurtful words that a human can say. We realize, Lord Jesus, that those are not the words You would speak to us. That Your words are healing words and helping words, not hurting words and harming words. So, Lord, through forgiveness, help us and let us listen to the voices in the balcony, the voices of the saints in this church that are encouraging us and telling us that God is for us. The voices of counselors and friends who are saying, "You can do everything through Christ who strengthens you." For the students who see themselves as a failure and incapable of study, that you will speak a voice from the balcony and give them the courage of mind to believe that the mind You gave them is a mind that is adequate for every challenge You place before them. For the person who is lacking confidence with people, lacking

## **VOICES FROM THE BALCONY**

**Luke 3:21–38**

confidence in their relationships within family, You are the one who makes us whole and puts Your strength and confidence within us. We call upon the Spirit of God to give all the faint-hearted the confidence and strength. And, Lord, we give ourselves anew to You, that we may be used by You, for we know we're always loved by You. In the Lord's name. Amen.