

Hidden and Revealed: The Sinless Son for Sinners

There's an acclaimed children's story about two young boys, one a prince and one an orphan boy, named Jemmy. The prince is so badly behaved and spoiled that he earns himself the nickname "Prince Brat" in all his kingdom. Since the other boy is an orphan who makes his living catching rats, he is taken into the royal castle and forced to become what's called a "Whipping Boy". You see, the prince was royalty and so it was forbidden for him to be spanked or punished. So instead of punishing him for his miserable behavior, the prince's Father, the King, would make Jemmy take the place of Prince Brat and receive the punishment instead. Jemmy became the "Whipping Boy."

What a preposterous arrangement! How could they possibly think that it was going to do any good to punish an innocent boy in place of selfish spoiled brat! In the story, prince Brat even takes terrible advantage of the situation by being fearlessly naughty so that Jemmy will get punished severely in his place. It seems like such foolishness to make the wrong boy pay for what the other had done, especially when prince Brat had no reason to be spiteful. He had everything, all the pleasures and privileges of a royal son. Absolute foolishness!

Before we write this particular King off as a terrible father and throw this story away, would it surprise you to find out that this is also the story of the Bible. This is exactly the kind of arrangement that our Father in heaven has made. The story of the "Whipping Boy" illustrates for us part of the foolishness of God that he has called us to believe in the gospel. For **"God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."** And so **"He chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...so that no one may boast before him!"** (1Cor. 1:21,27).

The Bible really is the story of God and his two sons. Today as we continue our series Hidden and Revealed, we get to see how God's "foolish" plan to give up one Son to save the other was hidden in the Old Testament prophecies and revealed in the New Testament. Today at the Baptism of our Lord, we see revealed in a dramatic way *the Sinless Son for Sinners*.

First, let's get a look at who these children are, and how they act. **"This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son."** (Exodus 4:22). And to his firstborn he gave a glorious inheritance in the promised land. **"He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye."** (Deuteronomy 33:10). He nourished him with the fruits of the field and milk and honey and gave him everything he could ever want and more.

But **"Israel, the upright one, grew fat and kicked; filled with food, they became heavy and sleek. They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Savior."** (Deuteronomy 32:15). God's firstborn son had become like plump little Prince Brat, always up to no good, always inciting his Father against him.

"The LORD saw this and rejected them because he was angered by his sons and daughters. 'I will hide my face from them,' he said, 'and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful.'" (Deuteronomy 32:20). The astounding thing is that these words of God were recorded by Moses nearly 1000 years before God finally hid himself and put his firstborn Israel into a 70-year timeout in captivity.

Even then God was only slowly unfolding his plan to send one Son to suffer and bring his runaway child back to himself. First, he would send a messenger to prepare the way, **"He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their**

parents.” (Malachi 4:6). That man’s name was John. **“And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** (Mark 1:4).

John’s job was to make the people see the “Prince Brat” inside of each of them—to repent, that is to see their sin, and loathe it, and turn away from it. And even more, to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. To the ones who were hoarding up all their wealth, he called them to share with those who had none. To tax-collectors who came, he told them to stop embezzling. To the soldiers, to stop extorting and blackmailing.

Now here’s the question each of you must take to heart today. If you were standing on the banks of the Jordan this very day, what would John have said to you? Where is the Prince Brat inside of you that deserves God’s stern punishment? As our nation once again erupts into frenzy, maybe John would borrow the Apostle Paul’s words, **“Stop biting and devouring each other, or you will be destroyed by each other!”** (Galatians 5:15). Especially now when it’s easier than ever because you don’t have to be out smashing windows at the capitol or at Target. You can devour your neighbor for breakfast all from the comfort of your social media, or some good old fashioned ranting and gossip to your old pals.

John’s message cut the people to the heart and it had a profound effect on them because they went and told other people what he said, and pretty soon the whole Judean countryside and the people of Jerusalem were walking 20 miles out to the Jordan River to hear what John had to say. They were cut to the heart and confessed their sins and were baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

Even John realized that he wasn’t the full solution, he was only the messenger. John pointed away from himself, **“After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.”** (Mark 1:7)

See, long ago the prophet Isaiah had revealed a conversation between the Father and the Son, the Only-Begotten Son of God. The Father said to the Son, **“You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”** (Isaiah 49:3). Remember, before God said the people of Israel were his firstborn son, his creations, but this son wasn’t acting like a son. So God took his own Son and made him a servant. And the Son recognizes his purpose, **“Now the LORD says—he who formed in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself.”** (Isaiah 49:5). God made his own sinless son into a servant to bring his sinful son Israel back and take the punishment he deserved—the *Sinless Son for Sinners*.

And what was the Servant Son’s response to becoming the “Whipping Boy”? **“I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has been my strength.”** (Isaiah 49:5). Yet even such a great task was not enough because the LORD also says, **“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”** (Isaiah 49:6). This is the Servant Son that John knew was coming, and he recognized with great humility the fact that he wasn’t even fit to do the job that only the lowliest servant would do: to take off his master’s dirty sandals.

Just as John prepared the way, that Servant Son arrived to take his office as the Sinless Son in place of Sinners. **“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”** (Mark 1:9). All the people before who came to John to be baptized, needed it for themselves to wash away their sins. But the Sinless Son doesn’t need to have any sin of his own washed away. The Sinless Son was baptized to show he was standing in our place.

This baptism was like his inauguration day to reveal what had been hidden during the first 30 years of his life. He was the long foretold Servant to bring back Jacob and bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

Notice the humility of the Servant. On his inauguration day, he comes not to great pomp and circumstance and humongous crowds, but to a man wearing a camel skin garment, to the lowly Jordan river, the river that Naaman once scoffed at washing in. But the Father did something special to reveal the office of his Son. **“Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, who I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11).**

Heaven itself was revealing God’s beloved Sinless Son to stand in the place of sinners, and he did it through baptism. That means something very special. At his baptism, the Sinless Son publicly stepped into your place, living in your stead the life of a true and perfect Son, whom God is pleased with.

Not only that, he took your place under the wrath of God, as your “Whipping Boy”. The Servant says, **“I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me.” (Isaiah 50:5,6).** And on the cross, he became orphaned from his Father and forsaken to death. on your behalf. Since this all this is true, it means at your baptism, you take his place, the place of the Father’s beloved child.

The Apostle Paul gives us a conclusion to this story about God and his children. **“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26-28).** That means God is well-pleased with you!

There’s maybe one final thing to say about those boys Jemmy and Horace, his real name wasn’t Brat. At the end of the story, those boys, once mortal enemies, become the best of friends, because throughout the rest of the story, Horace finally comes to see everything Jemmy did for him. When you realize in your story all that Servant Son went through to make you a child of God, put the brat aside! Show your appreciation by living as a child of God and the brother or sister of Jesus. **“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!” (John 8:36).** Live as the dearly loved children that God has made you to be. Amen.

Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. Amen.