

# Luke 4:1-13 - Our Identity in Christ: Identity Challenged

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Open your Bibles, if you will, to Luke 4. I'm going to read verses 1 through 14 in this extended study that we are in the middle of, of the Gospel of Luke.

You can follow with me as I read from God's Word of truth. And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days, being tempted by the devil.

And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. And the devil said to him, If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.

And Jesus answered him, It is written, man shall not live by bread alone. And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

[ 1 : 21 ] And said to him, To you, I will give all this authority and their glory. For it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.

If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours. Jesus answered him, It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.

And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you to guard you, and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

And Jesus answered him, It is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. And a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.

[ 2 : 39 ] Bow with me, if you will, as we pray that God would give us understanding from this portion of his word. Lord, Oh Lord, we are needy beyond our comprehension, but we are blessed beyond imagination.

We struggle in this world, but yet you've given us everything. You give us your spirit, you give us yourself. You've given us forgiveness, you've given us life.

You've taken away our penalty. You've come to dwell within us. Oh Lord Jesus, we thank you for the great truths.

We thank you for who you've made us to be, and who you are for us. We thank you for the hope that that gives us. And part of that hope, part of the gift you give us, is your word.

Your word is not just nice sayings and truths that we can gain from. Your word is life itself. It is your word.

[ 3 : 51 ] It is your word, your love letter to us, to remind us of who you are, and all that you've done. So, Lord Jesus, would you pour out your spirit?

Would you come and anoint me in a way that when all is said and done, we will have actually heard not words from a man, but words from you.

Come Holy Spirit. Would you speak to us and lead us into truth. We pray in the great name of our Savior, our Lord Jesus.

Amen. You know, last week, we witnessed, when we looked at the baptism of Jesus, we probably looked at the high point, that glory point, in many ways, of Jesus' ministry.

It was his very first public act. It was the entrance into this, now, three or so years of ministry. And it was glorious because we saw in his baptism that as he went into baptism and identified himself with us, he came up, heard the Father speak audibly to him with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him in the form of a dove.

[ 5 : 28 ] And he heard that glorious declaration, you are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. I mean, it just doesn't get any better than that.

But, as that is the high point, it also means it's probably downhill from there. And immediately, we know that, you know, from our own experience, we go to these great retreats, you'll hear this sermon and you'll be on such a spiritual high that you just can't stand it, but then walk out of here and reality of life returns.

And that's kind of the way it is. It's the way it was with Jesus because now, from this high point, he goes straight to the wilderness.

And from glory, he now enters into a period of very real struggle. And this struggle, this period that he's going to enter into the wilderness, I think is extremely instructive for us.

But I will also tell you, it is very intricately connected to what just happened at Jesus' baptism. So we can't forget that.

[ 6 : 59 ] Because now that he enters into the wilderness, everything he heard at that baptism, from heaven, from his father, is going to be put to the test.

And as it is with Jesus, so it will be for us. So Jesus enters the wilderness.

And there are three things, again, that I think we need to draw from this text. And because of time, we're not going to be able to go through and analyze all the temptations individually.

But there's something major going on here in this period. And the first thing we need to see is the normalcy of the wilderness. Secondly, we are going to see the challenge of the wilderness.

then finally, we're going to see victory in the wilderness. So let's look at the normalcy and the necessity of the wilderness.

[ 8 : 03 ] Two things. Immediately as you read this, I don't know if it struck you as a little odd or different, but if you notice, in verse 1, you know, right after the baptism, you know, we've gone through the genealogy, but this is immediately followed the baptism, the Holy Spirit is descended upon Jesus.

And, verse 1, and Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

In the wilderness. It was not the devil that led Jesus in the wilderness. It wasn't the devil that took Jesus to the wilderness. it was the Holy Spirit.

Now, I don't know if that strikes you as odd, but that is an important piece of information. First off, the wilderness, the whole idea of the wilderness, it runs all the way through Scripture.

This is one of those paradigms that describes so much of our experience and our relationship with God. And here, when he's talking about a wilderness, he's talking about the area there close to the Jordan, and there, if you've ever been to the Middle East, it is hot, it is dry, it is barren, it is desolate, it is a hard place to say the least.

[ 9 : 43 ] And so, in many ways, the wilderness, what the biblical writers do is they use the wilderness, this picture of wilderness to really describe what life is like for God's people here and now.

I mean, our world is not the way it was at the beginning, it's not the way it's going to be in the future, but we have this here and now, this middle, and for us, that's really the wilderness because it's here.

You know, I love that song, Satisfied, because it calls us to Christ as the only one who can satisfy, but it also tells us if you read through the verses of that song, that in this life and in this world, we hunger, we are thirsty, we keep running to things to try to satisfy those things in our heart and we can't find them and we keep coming up empty and so this world is really the wilderness and it's hard, it's a place of struggle and it might be, you know, that hardness might come from just the regular brokenness of life, it might come from your own sinful doings, it might come from pressure from the world simply because we are the people of God, but regardless, it will come, it is hard and it's normal and this strikes at the core of what is often termed the prosperity gospel.

Now, the prosperity gospel, we can make fun of those prosperity gospel preachers a lot, you'll see the memes on Facebook with Joel Osteen and some of those others because they're just preaching this happy, clappy gospel and if you're close to God everything's going to be great, you're going to prosper here and now materially, relationally, physically, in every way and we can very easily dismiss that as that's just not good theology, it's not true and so we don't fall prey to it because we're good Presbyterians or do we?

See, I live with this assumption that life is supposed to be good and I live with this assumption, it's underlying assumption, I wouldn't verbalize that I really believe this but I know I do because when things go foul, when life gets disrupted or I'm in a place where I hurt, I immediately think something's wrong and the first place that I go is that I want relief from that, I should get relief, you know, God must, I don't know what God's doing, you know, you make a decision, maybe you change jobs or you move to another town and as soon as you make that decision things start getting mucked up and what's your first thought?

[ 13 : 31 ] I missed God's will, I missed his leading, I, this must not be where God wants me, because if I was where God wants me, then it would have all gone smoothly.

Well, maybe, maybe not. You know, in the height of intimacy with Jesus, that Jesus had, in the height of intimacy with his father, the very height, he's led by the Holy Spirit into an extremely difficult place.

And it's normal. The Christian life, on this side of glory, is the wilderness. And we should not be surprised.

And I think a lot can be said too about how we should be parenting our children and preparing them for this. God's will for them may not be total self-fulfillment.

Or that they experience everything this world has to offer. Or that life is just the fullest. And sometimes I think we are communicating, we're preaching to our kids the prosperity gospel.

[ 14 : 56 ] people. And when trouble comes, they're not prepared. This world, on this side of glory, the wilderness, is normal.

It's not an aberration. It's normal. You know, even Jesus, you know, the second thing, that's the first thing we need to see about the wilderness here, is that it's normal.

But secondly, it's necessary. Hebrews 5, verse 8, there's this really interesting statement about Jesus himself, the perfect man.

And it says, although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Now, again, that sounds a little odd.

Why would somebody who is perfect have to learn obedience? Well, it's necessary for him because obedience is not real obedience until it is put to the test.

[ 16 : 11 ] Real faith, real obedience comes through the test. engineers, and you guys know this, most of the people in this room are engineers.

And you know that when you get on your computers, you guys are building some incredible things. I'm just amazed at some of the projects you're involved with.

You get on and you build these launch systems, you know, for space travel or this really cool aircraft, aircraft, and on the computer, man, it's looking great, and then you go from that, you build these models and they are cool.

You build it, you finally get to the place where you put one together and it's all there and sitting on the runway. This is one mean machine. But you know you're not finished because you have no idea if this design is really going to hold up.

And so what you do, you put it through testing that pushes it to the ultimate limits of what its capabilities are because only then do you know it can be trusted.

[ 17 : 37 ] And, you know, the wilderness is our stress test. for a believer to live his life at ease with everything given to him in a life of comfort and so forth, his faithfulness to God in that position is a good thing.

but, let's compare it to somebody else who's just gone through a battle of cancer, they've lost a child, maybe they've lost their jobs, maybe they're being persecuted by friends at school because their value system is so contrary to anybody else's, and they go through all this stress and then they still say at the end, God is faithful and good, whose faith are you going to say is the most genuine?

You see, the wilderness is necessary for us. It's not necessary for God to figure out if our faith is genuine. He already knows.

But it's necessary for us. Because it proves whether faith is there or not. You know, some of you might say at some point you get in one of those stressful situations and maybe you don't respond really well.

Maybe the words that come out of your mouth are pretty ugly or you just kind of flip out. And you say to those who may have witnessed it, oh, I'm sorry, I just wasn't myself.

[ 19 : 26 ] that, you know. I actually think in those situations we are far more ourselves than we are when everything is under control.

When we went to overseas, we were told ahead of time as we were moving our whole family to East Central Europe, we were told this great truth and I found it to be true on every level.

Moving to the mission field is like pouring miracle grow on all of your sin. That should encourage you to go to the missions.

Go missions. It's great. But what happens when you get into these foreign cultures, you deal with a foreign language, you deal with all this stuff, all of a sudden all those props that you used to have to hold life together don't work anymore.

And so your true support, the things that you really do trust, come to the surface, they fail, and now we see what you're really like.

[ 20 : 43 ] That would never happen outside of the stress test. We don't see the reality of faith while we're relaxing on the sofa. that. So, will your Heavenly Father lead you intentionally to a hard place?

Absolutely. Cheer up. Is it because He's trying to crush you? Absolutely not.

What He is trying to do is to crush what is false. To bring to life what is true. And the wilderness is the necessary place for that.

So, that's that normalcy and the necessity of this wilderness. We can't escape it. It is where we live. But now we see the challenge in the wilderness.

How does really the stress come on Jesus? in this account, we're not only given again that reality of the wilderness, but we're also given insight into the nature of how the challenges are going to come.

[ 21 : 58 ] And this is vital for us. And we have to remember the context. Remember what has Jesus just experienced? He's just experienced this great moment with the Spirit and the Father and His Sonship.

His identity as the beloved Son in whom the Father is well-pleased is front and center. And now as He enters into the wilderness, that is what is going to be tested.

You know, He gets out into the wilderness and then immediately He's been there for 40 days and the enemy comes to Him and says what?

If you are the Son of God. If He's trying to bring doubt by showing Him the hardness of the wilderness and He says this to Jesus twice.

In the first temptation the way that Luke arranges them in the first one and then in the last one. Both of those He begins by saying if you are the Son.

[ 23 : 21 ] Well, in the middle one it's interesting because He challenges them. He takes them to a place and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world. But if we read back in Psalm 2 verses 7 and 8 hear these words.

It said, I will tell of the decree the Lord said to me you are my son today I have begotten you ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.

I mean look at this. There's the declaration. It sounds so familiar from what we just heard back in Luke 3. And Satan is confronting Jesus.

He's confronting that promise. And he's confronting his true identity. And he's saying that the hardness of the wilderness is saying that obviously you've got it wrong.

So here's the crucial issue for us as we battle against sin. If you're going to defeat sin you've got to fight the right thing. You've got to fight the right enemy.

[ 24 : 47 ] And I think too often when we get into battle with our sin we see it as our behavior. What I need to do is I need to fight this bad behavior. I need to fight to gain a little bit more self control.

I need more determination simply to bring myself into line with all of this biblical rules and regulations and values and so forth.

The problem is that's not where the enemy comes to do battle. He's doing battle at the very core of who we are and what we believe.

You know if I am battling sexual sin or if I'm battling an addiction to something or if I'm battling an anxiety issue or I can't control my temper or any of that at the heart of it the issue is not how much self-control I have I mean that is part of it but the biggest issue is what do I believe about God?

Is he good? Does he love me? Is his promise sure?

[ 26 : 23 ] God that's where the challenge is you know one of one of my great lifelong struggles I think is my reliance on material resources to give me a sense of peace and rest in life when I pull up the computer and quicken and I look at all the numbers and the numbers of the bank accounts and the credit cards and all that stuff when there's a lot of red on that page I get terribly anxious fear and I feel like this security that I trust this foundation under my feet is no longer there and I become very vulnerable and so at that point then I get really uptight I get stressed and I'm just not very fun to be around so how do you fight that kind of anxiety how do you fight those kind of fears and that kind of dependence on material well I could go back to all the scriptures and said be generous and give all your money away or I could go memorize all those scriptures that say fear not is it going to work afraid not because that's not the issue the issue is that this is what the enemy basically says at that point he says you are alone it's all up to you you can live here in this hardship and struggle and you're going to you know get to retirement and you're going to not have any money and you're going to be stuck in some old people's home and nobody's going to come see you is that what you want or you can take shortcut you can fudge here just not give as much there you can do all these things and that will sure make all those numbers on the computer screen black instead of red and some of those things you'd really like to get you could but he says you're all alone and it's all up to you that's the lie and he offers a shortcut and this is exactly what enemy does to

Jesus Jesus has been out in the wilderness he's been out there for 40 days and he has not eaten and I think it's such an understatement where Luke writes and he got hungry yeah I'm dying after 24 hours I cannot imagine going a month and a half and he calls Jesus attention to his suffering and he said hey you can end this right now you've got the power just come in that stone will become bread and this will all be over you get relief that's the reasoning a son should not suffer like this if God were good and you were so precious then you should not be in pain let's fix this because obviously

God is not there so it's up to you you know the second temptation is the same it's a little bit different he's now here he's not just tempting him to bring relief in his momentary hunger but he's now attempting him for power and control and he basically says Jesus you don't have to go this route that you're on you can get out of this suffering you don't have to go down this path to Jerusalem I know where you're going we can skip all that just I can give you everything obviously you're alone out here God has abandoned you the third temptation is the same says if you are the son throw yourself off the top of this temple and it'll be glorious forget the cross forget the humility forget the the suffering forget all of that just throw yourself down you got the scriptures here that support you just in everything the temptation is if you're suffering

God obviously doesn't love you if you're if you're in the hard place and you're experiencing pain you're obviously not the beloved son in whom the father is well pleased so take the shortcut get relief and this is what he says to us when we're tempted sexually when we're tempted materially when we're tempted in every way at the core of it is this are you a son are you serious is God good are his promises sure are you the beloved and here here is where we need to remember that if we are in

Jesus we are God and the wilderness is doing nothing to compromise that thirdly and here's the good news of all this we do see victory in the wilderness and Jesus brings it you know one of the obvious things about this passage is that we might overlook that Jesus wins in all of these temptations and then we see that great verse in verse 14 where it says and the spirit leads him back out of the wilderness into Galilee Jesus wins the victory and he does so contrary to what God's people have done up until now throughout all the centuries as they live through the wilderness

[ 33 : 52 ] God's people have been there every time things got hard they ran and left and they went to other gods they went to other sources they took shortcuts to cut short the pain to bring relief but where they failed Jesus succeeds and again this is so important because we are talking about our identity in Christ because we identified with him he with us in his baptism he came and embraced our brokenness our sin he was baptized of saying I'm one with you that's mine I'm going to take it so we are identified with Christ in that and then we also saw that as he comes up and the father declares his sonship we were there too in that joyful passionate loving dance of the trinity there with the spirit and the father and the son that's what we're brought into that is our identity and now here in the wilderness it's the same thing

Jesus wins the battle and I do too because I'm in Christ you know if it's left up to me I wouldn't have a whole lot of hope of being a son because far too often my hope of being a son a son in whom his father delights a son in whom the father is well pleased I base so much of that hope on how I perform in my faith and if that's what it's based on I have a little hope and I bet you do too but that's not where our hope is because

Jesus succeeded Jesus won the battle this is what Christ does for me I am in Christ my sin was taken in Christ I am declared the son in Christ and now I have victory in Christ he wins the battle and I'm there in him and when he wins I win and now in Christ I can say even though in this wilderness my performance is much to be desired I win

I win I win now is this going to encourage us to say well that's the case I can just run off and do whatever I want whatever I want to do I don't have to obey because I'm in Christ he's already won it's okay I don't think that's where we're going to go because of this I used to have a dog that I used to is the key word here that I really struggled with and what I'm about to say is probably going to make all you pet owners terribly angry with me but I have improved I have changed I don't have a pet anymore well this dog that we had was not the most obedient and part of the reason was I didn't train him very well though

I don't think this dog was going to do very well even being trained but he would get out of the yard sometimes and sometimes he'd get out of the yard at the most inappropriate moments you're getting ready to leave you're loading up the kids you've got to go somewhere and there goes the dog making his beeline around the neighborhood and there is no way you're going to go catch him because even in my prime I was not as fast as my dog and so I just got angry you run in you grab that newspaper roll it up and imagine what you're going to do with it when you ever got your hands on the dog and funny thing is I could never get my hands on the dog when I had that newspaper funny thing now why wouldn't the dog come to me well

[ 39 : 40 ] I got smart and put the newspaper away and I got down on my knees and stretched out my hands and the dog came running to me imagine that imagine what fear does if we think that God is not pleased and that if we fail he's just going to whack us around to beat some sense into us but too often that's what we think he is we forget the fact that we're sons beloved sons in whom he is pleased and so now the father he simply gets down and stretches out his arms it's a day come come and when we begin to comprehend that depth of our sonship oh we'll come there's no question because we're out here in the wilderness and it's not working for us but we are sons we are daughters we are the beloved we are pleasing in his sight and he simply says come

I am your identity I am your victory I am your hope come and so if we are in Christ this is our hope if you're not in Christ you're alone you have no such identity you have no such hope all you have is yourself and how's it working for you Christ says come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden I will give you rest come to Christ who gives us our identity and our hope and our victory in this barren world let's pray together father we thank you for hope we thank you for

Christ now help us to believe help us to believe that it could actually be true help us to believe that it could be true for us help us to believe that your love is unfailing that your delight is unfading and the stamp that you have placed upon us can never be erased help us to believe and if there is someone here who has yet to grasp that would you by that great work of your Holy Spirit open the blinds open the curtains and let light into the darkness that they can behold the glory of our Savior our Lord Jesus Amen For more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org)