

Luke 3:23-38 - A QUESTION OF IDENTITY: Identity Established

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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.

If you have Bibles, you'll open them to Luke as we continue our study. Will came in to my office weeks ago and asked me if I wanted to preach on this text.

And I think the reason he asked is that he didn't want to pronounce all these names. Well, I'm not going to either. Because, one, I don't want this just to be a time where you're impressed with my pronunciation.

But also, you wouldn't know if I'm butchering them or not. So, what we're going to do, I'm going to read down through verse 23. And then skip down to verse 34.

And take up reading there. So, here now, God's inspired word of truth. Now, when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized.

[1 : 14] And was praying, the heavens were opened. And the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven.

You are my beloved son. With you, I am well pleased. And Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about 30 years of age.

And now skip on down to verse 34.

Where it says, The son of Eber, the son of Canaan, the son of Arphakad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalel.

The son of Canaan, the son of Enoch, the son of Enoch, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. Let me pray for us as we approach this study.

[2 : 33] Father, even in these places of Scripture where we think, you know, we just kind of skip over them. There's nothing here. Yet, you've given them to us for our benefit, our profit.

But there is so much here. Father, would you, in the power of your Spirit, work through the foolishness of this man and speak to us in a way only your Spirit can.

Come and lead us not just to a knowledge of truth, but cause this truth to be planted deep within our souls.

That we might be transformed more and more into that likeness of our Savior, our Lord Jesus. We pray in His name.

Amen. You know, there is a lot of interest today in genealogies. I mean, it's fascinating stuff.

[3 : 40] There's been a program on public TV called Finding Your Roots. Have any of y'all ever seen that? I mean, this is great.

They take these well-known people, and this guy goes back and searches history all through their family tree, even to doing genetic testing at the end, and telling them, you know, where all these fascinating places where they've come from.

And it really is a fascinating thing. Even one of my kids has been very interested in our own family tree, you know, through these years.

And I want to put up a picture here for you. Oh, no, not that one. I guess we don't have it.

Anyway, what I was going to show you is I have a picture of my family that was taken back at the end of the 19th century.

[4 : 46] Back in the late 1800s. And, you know, of my great-grandfather, my great-grandfather, and my great-great-grandfather.

And I wish you could see it, but, I mean, it's of interest to me because what that picture tells me is that this is where I came from. And I think the whole interest that we have in genealogies is that we want to know who we are.

And those genealogies tell us, you know, this is where we came from. These are our roots. This is how we have been shaped by all of this. In fact, I was walking through when my mother was in the hospital a couple years ago having surgery.

And I was caring for her. I walked down the hall and overheard a conversation in another guest's room. And there was this old guy talking to, it was a patient, talking to one of the young girls who was caring for him.

And the conversation was going on. And finally, he just stopped and asked her this question. He says, who's your daddy? And what he wanted to know was, her daddy, if he knew who her daddy was, that was going to tell him all kinds of things about her.

[6 : 12] Whether she could be trusted or so forth. So in some ways, when we come to these genealogies in scripture, we also look at them in a similar way.

We can't read these. And typically, the genealogies, we have two in the New Testament. We have others in the Old Testament, but we have two in the New Testament.

The beginning of Matthew and here in Luke. And a lot of times, we just skip over these parts. But these genealogies tell us something.

And the authors are trying to give us something special. Something in particular through these genealogies. We can't read them like we would normally read them.

You know, when I would go look at this picture, I could say, all right, that's my grandfather. And then his father. And then his father. And you see the direct line. Well, the writers in the Bible don't give us genealogies that way.

[7 : 11] They are intentional in what they want to communicate through these genealogies.

Therefore, they're very selective in who they put in there. And so one of the things you'll discover, if you compare Matthew and Luke, there's two different sets of names.

Especially in between David and Jesus. Now, we can't explain why those are different. I can't tell you more than that.

But we know that the differences in our questions simply come because we don't have enough information. But these writers are giving us a message.

And Luke is giving us a very specific message. And one of the ways that Luke differs from his use of genealogy from Matthew is, Matthew begins with Abraham and moves upward to Jesus in a very methodical, very thematic way.

There's three sets of names. And he is trying to connect the Messiah, Jesus, as that Messiah who would come from Abraham.

[8 : 24] But Luke doesn't do that. Luke starts with Jesus and goes backwards. And he doesn't stop when he gets to Abraham. He goes all the way back to Adam.

And so what is Luke telling us here? Luke is giving us a picture of Jesus' very first day of ministry. He has come out of this preparation period, 30 years of growing and maturing.

And today Jesus comes and enters public ministry. And to do that, Luke is now giving us this genealogy.

Because that genealogy is telling us so much of who this Jesus is. And also what he has come to do for us.

So as we look at this, there's three things that I'm going to want us to see. First, this is all about identity. All of it is about Jesus' identity.

[9 : 36] And therefore, it's also about our identity. So the first thing we see is how Jesus identifies with us. Secondly, we're going to see how God the Father, really the Holy Trinity, comes and identifies and celebrates with Jesus.

And thirdly, we're going to see what the implications are for us of that. Look at Luke 3, 21.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the question, we read this and the question comes up, and I've already been asked this question this morning, why, if Jesus is righteous and pure, and baptism, as you heard last week, was a baptism for repentance of sin, why does Jesus have to be baptized?

Well, you know, why baptism? Why is this the very first thing that he does as he enters into his ministry?

Well, Jesus is not being baptized for his sake. He's being baptized for our sake. What he's doing, this act of baptism, is his way of saying, I'm with you.

[11 : 18] Jesus is entering into this act. He's getting, he's coming into this baptism to help us and identify with us right where we are.

He's not helping from a distance. He's not just reaching down from some far place, but he has decided he has come to enter into all of the muck, all of the mire, all of the filth, all of the pain, all of the hardness, all of the brokenness of this life.

And so, he does not just, again, help from a distance. He enters into the worst of it. That is why he comes and is baptized.

He takes upon himself this baptism of repentance. Because that is what he has come to do. He's chosen to enter into the very pit of our world.

He experiences it. He lives it. He tastes it. He tastes the oppression, the struggle, and then he owns it.

[12 : 35] It is his. This is why the writer of Hebrews, the passage that we just read a few minutes ago, towards the end there, he says, He had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. And this is an incredible thing. And I think we miss the significance of this.

The Holy One of Israel, the righteous one, the righteous God, identifies with us.

He comes from his holy throne to us, into the muck and mire where we live. And he identifies with us. He takes on that identity.

He makes it his own. And he doesn't just say from a distance, you know, I know. But he does tell us, I know.

[13 : 49] I've been there. I'm there with you. And so in that, he can help. But we don't have a Savior who calls us to something, someplace where he's never been.

He is a Savior who has gone before us. He is a Savior who has tasted everything. He is a Savior who has been tempted in everything, which we'll see more of next week.

But he's been there and identifies with us. But also in addition, and this is the critical part, by identifying with us, being baptized to identify with us, he's not only owning our fallen state, but it also means he's going to be treated as if he were us.

Jesus, in effect, in his baptism, is becoming sin. He is becoming the broken, the fallen.

And because of that, because he is taking it upon himself fully, all of the wrath, all of the anger, all of the judgment that God would pour out on us as broken sinners, it's now going to be poured out on him.

[15 : 28] And this is telling us where he's going. This is telling us where the ministry is taking him. It's taking him to a place where he is going to suffer the penalties that our sins deserve.

Because here he's taking them on himself. Secondly, something else we have here in this text is we get this picture of the Trinity.

You know, we don't, when we study the Scriptures, the Trinity is one of those doctrines that's never explicitly stated to us, but we get illusions, we get pictures of it all through the Scriptures, from the Old Testament up through the New, and this is one of the most clear of those pictures.

Because here, it is, we're given this window to look into this joyous, passionate relationship that is enjoyed between the Father, the Spirit, and the Son.

You know, as Jesus is being baptized, he comes up out of the water and he's praying. I mean, he's talking to the Father. But here, he comes up and the heavens open.

[16 : 56] And from the heavens descends a dove, the Holy Spirit in a bodily form of a dove and alights on him and you hear this voice from heaven declaring, it says, this is my Son in whom I'm well pleased.

And then, there's only really one other place where we see that the heavens open and God speaks like that and that's on the Mount of Transfiguration. but here, we're given this window into this glorious union, this relationship that exists between the three.

Now, let me take a second. This, when we talk about the Trinity, we're talking about this, one of these huge theological concepts. And I think sometimes we think it's kind of obscure.

How does it even affect us? Yeah, it's great for theologians to talk about, but this is, I think, at least for me in these last few years, has become one of the most dear theological doctrines that there is. One of the things is that when you talk about God being a God of love, that demands the existence of the Trinity.

[18 : 22] So let's think about this. When Islam talks about God, they do talk about God is a God of love, but they also talk about God is just one.

There is no Trinity. There is just one who has existed for all time throughout eternity as one. Now, how does he know how to love?

love? He's never had anyone to love. It's just him. And it's interesting, if you look at the depictions that Islam makes of this God, they're primarily not a God of love.

Because a God who has existed alone for eternity would really not have an idea, have a clue. what love is. But when we come to the God of the Bible, we have something very different. That God has existed for all time in relationship.

[19 : 36] Father, Spirit, Son. And it's a joyous, passionate relationship, and they've lived in this love relationship for eternity.

And therefore, when we hear that God is, that God loves, we can know it's true because it's part of his essence. That's part of all that he is. That's part of what he has done for eternity.

Love is at his core. And so, as we talk about the gospel, that's, we talk about a God of love. love. Because he has loved through all of his existence.

And so, in this scene, what we're given is just a picture, a little bit of a glimpse of the relationship that these three have.

And the love and the passion in this love, you see in the statement which is proclaimed from heaven about the Son. And there are three things about what God says that we need to pay attention to.

[20 : 48] He says, first, he says, this is my son. Not a stranger, not an orphan, but a son.

I remember, you know, I have two sons, along with two daughters, but I remember, you know, when my oldest son was born, and I held him in my hand for the first time, and I said, this is my son.

This is not some stranger's kid. This is a son who bears my name, is going to be in this relationship with me forever. There's no separation here.

There's no divorce from being a son. He's my son. son. And that says something that I could say about no one else.

And so the father is declaring to Jesus that he is now the son. But he goes beyond that. He said, this is my beloved son.

[22 : 00] There are sons, and then there are sons. And some of us have grown up in relationships maybe where we didn't feel beloved by our fathers.

You know, maybe we had fathers that were distant, maybe fathers that were difficult. maybe we are fathers that are distant and difficult.

You know, maybe we weren't wanted. Maybe somehow as sons we disappointed them somewhere. But I know that in my growing up as a son, there was one thing that I wanted more than anything else in life, and I wanted my dad to communicate to me and to say to me in no uncertain terms that I was not just his son, but I was beloved.

That I was of the highest value to him. And I would have given anything to have heard that. In fact, I was, in a lot of my years growing up, I was just angry because I didn't sense that from him.

But imagine the joy of hearing your father saying, you are my son, but you are my beloved. And this is what the father declares of Jesus.

[23 : 38] But he goes even farther. He said, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

We might be dearly beloved, we might be in love by our fathers, but you know, down inside, I think sometimes we know we have not been the sons that we should have been.

I wasn't. You know, I know I was, of all three of our kids, I'm sure that I was the most difficult of the three.

I'm sure that I gave my dad a lot of grief, and I'm sure that he was disappointed and probably ashamed sometimes of the decisions that I made. They, uh, because, I mean, I didn't work well, I didn't, you know, sometimes I talked back to him.

My choices of clothing style, and particularly in those days, my hairstyle, was not so conducive to him going to the country club and being proud of his son.

[24 : 58] And so, in many ways, I think maybe we sense a disappointment, and especially, you know, here thinking of our Heavenly Father.

But this is why hearing these words at the end are so critical, because I'm not just a son. Jesus is not just a son. He is not just the beloved son, but he is the son that gives his father joy.

The father is pleased and declares it to the world. son. And so, now we see, and the spirit is there as well, and so this is the relationship that all three of these members of the Trinity have with one another.

The father declares that the son is the joy of his heart, and he and the spirit come to identify with him how closely they are identified and connected with one another.

So now we come to the best part, I think. The third way of identification has taken place here is that we now identify with the son and the father and the spirit, because we are in Christ.

[26 : 34] See, the question you have to ask here, why would God proclaim audibly, why would he descend visibly and bodily on Jesus like that at that moment?

Was it for Jesus' sake? sake? I don't think so. I think it was for our sake. If Jesus has identified himself so intimately with us, he does so that we can now identify with him.

Jesus in his baptism takes our sin, owns our sin, takes all of our brokenness and our fallenness upon himself, identifies with us, and then agrees to be treated as if he were us.

but then he does so so that we can now be identified with him in all of the glory, all of the joy, all of the love and all the pleasure and we can be treated as if we were him.

Let that sink in a little bit. Let me ask this question. It's a question that I know that some of you guys have heard because we talked about the men's retreat.

[28 : 34] What does God think of you? What does God think of you? Now I know most of you have been through Sunday school so you know the answer is God loves me. Jesus loves me. This I know. For the Bible tells me so.

Okay. God loves you. But does he like you? When your name crosses his mind, what's the expression on his face?

Is he grinning from ear to ear? Or is he just kind of beating his head? When are they going to ever straighten up?

When are they ever going to get with the program? How long do I have to wait? You ever feel like you're just one big disappointment to your Heavenly Father?

And you wonder when the day's going to come where he's going to say, okay, one more time. we've hit a limit here.

[29 : 40] One more time. I think that's common because we sense the brokenness, we sense the sin, we sense the failure.

And it's hard for us to think otherwise. But that's why this particular passage is so important.

Because if we're in Christ, we know the answer to that question. God is ecstatic because he says to us, you are my son, my daughter, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.

How desperately we need to hear that. But it's not just here. I want you to look at one other passage in Zephaniah 3, verse 17, which I love.

It says, the Lord your God is in your midst. Notice, he's in your midst. He's not distant. He's not far off. He's right with you.

[31 : 13] love. He's not with you. And that means he must like you because he wants to be with you. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save.

Now look what he says. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you with his love. And look at this last statement.

He will exalt over you with loud singing. He will exalt over you with loud singing.

Almost makes us think God's charismatic. He's ecstatic.

How can God be that ecstatic over us the way we are? Because if we believe we are in Christ and what Christ has come to do is to identify with us so fully that he would come to be treated as if he were us so that we could be treated as if we were him.

[32 : 56] So this picture of the Trinity is glorious because Jesus is taking me right into the middle of it. his salvation is so great, so full, so complete that I now enjoy the love, the passion, the celebration of the Trinity itself.

I am the beloved son in whom he is well pleased all because what Christ has done for me. he has taken my sin so fully and he paid the price. Now I can know his joy.

God is that good news? It's critical. This identity is critical for us because it affects everything and we'll see more next week of how that works out.

God is to the Lord's table in many ways this is what we are doing. We are celebrating the identity that we have in Christ.

[34 : 33] we are not coming just to eat a little piece of bread but we're coming to identify ourselves with Christ.

So as we eat of the bread we drink of the cup we are feeding on Christ and we are declaring that I'm in Christ and I therefore can enjoy all the benefits of being in Christ.

But it's also important then for us to give you this warning. If you're not in Christ or if you're living in such a state maybe unrepentance or you're living in a state of sin that you know is that I would ask you that as others come to celebrate if you would remain in your seats and pray and ask the spirit to come and bring you to that place of repentance of turning to Christ and owning for yourself his sacrifice so that you can experience his great joy.

Let me pray for us. Holy Father help us understand this new identity.

Help us understand who we are. Help us to comprehend the depth of salvation that has been granted to us.

[36 : 23] Christ himself through his broken body has taken all of our sin. He has come and owned our place in this fallen world and has paid the price.

But he has so purified us. He has made us so righteous that we now are the beloved. We are the joy of our heavenly father.

father. And we can know all that pleasure and love as the son. So as we eat and feed on this little morsel of bread and this little cup of juice make it a feast of grace and feed our hearts so there's no more hunger.

And we come give thanks to you for this in Jesus name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org