

An Identity Revealed

Luke 3:21-38

Jesus Came To Earth To Rescue And Redeem Those Who Would Identify With Him.

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IV. Summary

An Identity Revealed

Luke 3:21-38

So far, Luke has been alternating between the early lives of Jesus and John. In this morning's text, Luke is going to bring their lives together. Last time we left John out in the wilderness along the Jordan River preaching repentance and baptizing those who received the message. This morning, we will see Jesus, John's cousin, come to be baptized by John. The act of Jesus' baptism has been debated by scholars throughout the centuries, so I don't hope to even come close to solving that problem. But I will try to understate the significance rather than overstate things that I'm not so sure of.

We have already seen that Jesus had some self-awareness of Who He was already at 12-years-old when He informed His mother and father that He had to be in His Father's house, referring to the temple.

The event of Jesus' baptism kicks off His public ministry. All throughout His ministry, Jesus will reveal more and more of Himself. But in this morning's text, we will start to get a feel for His identity. In the Christian creeds, we affirm Jesus as fully God and fully human. Today many people have chosen to identify Jesus as merely a human do-gooder, a great moral teacher, a great philosopher, or a Jewish martyr. However, Jesus made it clear that He was the unique, one and only Son of God. Jesus claimed to be God.

It can be dangerous if our identities are not clear. A middle aged woman had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she had a near-death experience. During that experience she saw St. Peter and asked him if this was it. St. Peter said no and went on to promise the lady she had another 40 years to live.

Upon her recovery, the lady decided to stay in the hospital an extra week and have a face lift, liposuction, a tummy tuck, and some other procedures. When she got out she had a makeover, getting her hair colored, a new hairdo, and a new wardrobe. After all, she reasoned as long as she had another 40 years, she might as well look good.

Just as she came out of the store with her new outfit on, an ambulance came speeding around the corner, hit her, and killed her.

Again, she found herself in front of St. Peter and she angrily protested, "I thought you promised me that I had 40 more years to live. What's the deal?"

St. Peter, a little sheepish replied, "Sorry about that. I didn't recognize you."

Jesus made it very clear Who He was and what He came to accomplish. Jesus' identity is tied up in His mission. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO RESCUE AND REDEEM THOSE WHO WOULD IDENTIFY WITH HIM.** In other words, Jesus revealed Himself to be our Savior, our Redeemer, and our God. If we think about this, Jesus is the perfect mediator between God and humans. He can identify with God because He is fully God. And He can identify with us because He was fully human. And part of the good news of the Gospel is that He invites us to identify with Him.

I. JESUS IDENTIFIED WITH HUMAN BEINGS

Recognizing Our Helplessness (21a)

In the first half of verse 21, Luke demonstrates how Jesus identified with human beings. **JESUS IDENTIFIED WITH US BY LIVING LIFE EXACTLY HOW WE ARE EXPECTED TO.** When I have confronted people with sin in their lives they have often responded to me, “I’m only a human being. I can’t be perfect. Leave me alone,” to which I respond, “Jesus was human and he lived a perfect life.” Since Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life as a human being, we have no excuse for our sin.

Jesus identified with us by first of all recognizing our helplessness. The passage starts out, “When all the people were being baptized.” It seems as if many people responded to John’s message. In his message people were confronted with the truth that all of us have broken faith with God. We were all born with this natural bent and attraction towards evil. If you don’t believe that, then you have never spent an extended period of time with children or have ever raised children. Next, we have all willfully rejected God through pride, arrogance, ignorance, worshiping false gods, making up false religion, or indifference. John made it clear that we have all offended God. Further, in laying out repentance, John really did show how far short we fall from God’s standards and how impossible it is for us to save ourselves. John prepared the crowds to understand their need for a Savior, a Redeemer, The Messiah. As Jesus looked on, I’m sure He felt brokenhearted over the helplessness and the hopelessness the repentant sinners felt as they were baptized. But as He saw this, I’m sure His mission became more and more intense and His resolve became even more steadfast and urgent.

Taking On Our Identity (21a)

And that’s why we see Jesus taking on our identity here. Luke simply says, “Jesus was baptized too.” In Matthew’s account, John protests and tells Jesus that he needs to be baptized by Jesus. But in the end, John is convinced to baptize Jesus. If you remember from last time, we said that baptism was a rite usually participated in by people who were converted to Judaism. It was for outsiders to become insiders. But we also said that John’s message was that Jews themselves had become outsiders to God’s chosen people and they also needed to be baptized. When we are baptized, we are stating two major things. First of all, we are joining in Jesus with His death and resurrection. In other words, just as Jesus died for our sins, when we go under the water, we are symbolizing our death and joining ourselves to Christ’s death. When we come up out of the water, we are symbolically joining ourselves to Christ’s resurrection. In other words, we have died to our life before Christ and come alive to our new life in Christ. We have left death behind to come alive. So our baptism first of all is our identity with Christ. But secondly it is a rite that joins us to the family of God. We are now publicly identified with Jesus and His people.

If we identify with Jesus in our baptism, then it seems to me that Jesus willingly identified Himself with us in His baptism. Jesus was not repenting for sin. He never sinned. His baptism was His public demonstration that He came to redeem us. Remember, in the Hebrew, the word

for redeemer is goel and it is often translated kinsman-redeemer because it is usually a relative that has the obligation to redeem the one who has fallen into slavery.

Secondly, Jesus came from heaven. Even though earth and everything in it was created through Jesus, He was still a stranger and an outsider to those He came to save. Listen to how the Apostle John described this incredible state of affairs:

“10But although the world was made through Him, the world didn’t recognize Him when He came. 11Even in His own land and among His own people, He was not accepted” (John 1:10-11 / NLT).

We need to always remember that we only love because God first loved us. The first and most primary movement of love is by God towards us. Jesus willingly left heaven and came down to rescue us, save us, and redeem us. The first step He took was to identify with us. **JESUS IDENTIFIED WITH US BY LIVING LIFE EXACTLY HOW WE ARE EXPECTED TO.**

II. JESUS IDENTIFIED WITH GOD

The next revelation about Jesus’ identity was that Jesus identified with God in the second half of verse 21 through verse 22. In these verses we will see **GOD THE FATHER AND GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT TESTIFIED THAT JESUS WAS GOD THE SON.**

Heaven Opened (21b)

In the second half of verse 21 we see heaven opened up. Isn’t that what we all long for, to see heaven open up for us and on us? If that’s the case, then let’s take a look at what was the occasion for heaven to open. First of all, Jesus was steadfastly pursuing God’s will for His life. He humbly and publicly submitted to baptism. And next we see that He was praying. If we want to see heaven opened up then our lives should be characterized by prayerful obedience. If we stop and think about this for a moment, we can see that heaven opened up for Jesus and through Jesus, for us. Also we need to keep in mind that life is not just about us and not just about the immediate. Listen to Isaiah’s prayer about 700 years before this incident:

“1 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!” (Isaiah 64:1 / NIV).

We look forward to that time that the sky will split apart, the archangel will blow the trumpet, and Christ will return. However, we must always keep in mind that when the heavens open, it not only brings blessings, it can bring judgment. In Genesis 7:11, the floodgates were opened and we know the earth and all people in it except for 8 were totally annihilated. When Jesus comes at the end of time, it will truly be a time of blessing for those who have chosen to follow Him, but listen to what also comes with the heavens opening up and God visiting earth:

“19So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and loaded the grapes into the great winepress of God’s wrath. 20And the grapes were trodden in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress in a stream about 180 miles long and as high as a horse’s bridle” (Revelation 14:19-20 / NLT).

The Holy Spirit Descended (22a)

If we live prayerfully obedient lives, then we too can rejoice with God's people when heaven opens up and Jesus returns. As heaven opened, the Holy Spirit descended as described in verse 22. I want us to be careful Bible students. Luke uses two metaphors in describing the descent of the Holy Spirit and people often misunderstand. He says that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in bodily form like a dove. This is not the Holy Spirit embodied in a dove. In Acts when the Holy Spirit comes to the church Luke said that what appeared to be tongues of fire separated and settled on them. When we are talking about God, our language will never be adequate to describe Him. In fact, we only assign a male gender to God the Father because He is referred to as Father. But He also refers to Himself as a Mother guarding her hens. The Holy Spirit is a neuter gender but it seems disrespectful to refer to the Holy Spirit as an it. God has chosen male language to reveal Himself but that is simply due to a lack in our language. God is beyond gender Listen to how Genesis put it:

"27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27 / NIV).

God's being contains in it male, female, and beyond. What is important here is that something physical took place, something that could be seen. Some sort of presence, came down from heaven rested on Jesus and anointed Him. This was the Holy Spirit witnessing to Jesus' public ministry, His identity as God, and His role as Savior, Redeemer, and Lord.

Again, when anyone submits to Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit enters us, gifts us, leads us, and becomes the medium by which Jesus comes to live in us. If you are an authentic believer, then you have received the Holy Spirit.

God The Father Spoke (22b)

Heaven opened up and there was a visible anointing of Jesus by God the Holy Spirit. And in the second half of verse 22, God the Father spoke. So far in Luke's Gospel, we have only seen and heard angels speak. But at Jesus' baptism, God the Holy Spirit was seen and God the Father was heard. God said to Jesus and about Jesus, "You are my Son Whom I love; with You I am well pleased." Again, listen to how this event was predicted 700 years earlier by the prophet Isaiah:

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1 / NIV).

Also in the Hebrew Scriptures, Psalm 2 is a coronation Psalm but it is often applied to Jesus in the New Testament:

"7I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'" (Psalm 2:7 / NIV).

You will never find the word Trinity in the Bible but it is a doctrine that is absolutely necessary to believe if one wants to be a Christian. Traditionally the church has put it this way and our by-laws affirm it this way: “We believe in one God; of one substance, existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; co-equal and eternal.”

III. JESUS IDENTIFIED WITH HIS MINISTRY

Jesus will make this concept clearer throughout His ministry. In fact, the religious people of the time will try and kill Him because He claimed to be God. But here, GOD THE FATHER AND GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT TESTIFIED THAT JESUS WAS GOD THE SON.

In the text so far, Jesus has identified Himself with us. God has identified Jesus with Him. In verses 23-38 we see how Jesus is identified with His ministry. This section is meant to demonstrate that JESUS WAS THE PROMISED MESSIAH. In other words, this genealogy is meant to prove that Jesus is the One Who was promised from the Garden of Eden, through Abraham, and King David.

The Ministry Begins (23a)

The ministry begins in the first half of verse 23. I think this verse is noteworthy, especially to pastors who simply went through college and then to seminary, and then into the ministry, or politicians who have never had a real job. Luke says that Jesus was now about 30-years old when He began His ministry. That means that if he started to work in Joseph’s business at 13-years-old, Jesus would have been working as a carpenter for 17 years. That means that Jesus knew what it meant to have a blue-collar job. This was physical labor. Jesus knew what it was to have calloused hands, a sore back from heavy lifting, and blood from cuts and splinters. He experienced life as you and I do. He had to work to help support Himself and His family. Jesus didn’t take any short cuts to life, nor did He make His own rules. As we read through the Gospels, we can see the great blue collar illustrations that Jesus used and how clearly they made the point of the teaching. His baptism kicked off His public ministry.

The Messiah Of Hope (23b-27a)

The second half of verse 23 through the first half of verse 27 points to the Messiah of hope. Before we get into the list, let me point out that there are several patterns brought out by different scholars. For example, many find the list broken down into 11 sets of 7 names. Now if you’re obsessive compulsive like I am, you’d start counting the names and find out if we leave out Jesus and God in the genealogy, we are two names short. However, in some manuscripts two other names are mentioned. If that is the case, then we could start out by saying that Jesus is the Son of God. That would be the first and last Names on the list.

Next, there is another genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew works forward from Abraham to Jesus. Luke works backwards from Jesus to Adam.

Luke lists the generations between God's creation of Adam through the calling of Abraham. The names Adam through Terah are not listed in Matthew. However, Matthew and Luke's list of names between Abraham and David are identical. Then the last names that agree between the two lists are found in Shealtiel and Zerubbabel.

Some scholars want to say that Luke's genealogy is Mary's and Matthew's is Joseph's. However, that doesn't really seem to be the case. Joseph is Jesus' legal father for inheritance purposes. Joseph is from the tribe of Judah and the line of King David. We know that Mary was related to Zechariah and Elizabeth who were both Levites, the priestly tribe. It would be interesting to think that Jesus came from both the Kingly line of Judah and the Priestly line of Levi. After all Jesus is our King and High Priest.

Now let's get to the names in this section. These verses contain the first 3 sets of 7 names. Other than Zerubbabel and Shealtiel, none of the names are known and none found in Matthew's list. But what is interesting here is that in referring to Jesus at the end of verse 23 Luke says that it was thought that Jesus was the son of Joseph, indicating that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary.

The Messiah Of Mystery (27b-31a)

Well in verse 27, the two names that end the first triplet of sevens are Zerubbabel and Shealtiel. Here is what the interesting comparison is here. King Zedekiah was the last king of Judah before King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and carried off the Jews back to serve as captives in Babylon. The kingly privilege fell to Joconiah, Zedekiah's nephew when Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah executed. Joconiah had two sons, Pedaiah and Shealtiel. This is the Shealtiel in our genealogy. He is found in both Matthew and Luke's list. But here is what is interesting. First of all the name Shealtiel means I asked God for this child. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Zerubbabel is referred to sometimes as the son of Shealtiel and at other times the son of Pedaiah. According to Jewish law, if a man could not get his wife pregnant or died childless, his brother would have to father a child for him. Some speculate that Shealtiel was in line for the throne but he couldn't have a child or died childless so his brother Pedaiah fathered Zerubbabel but Zerubbabel inherited his father's right to the throne. I say that may be interesting because Jesus inherits Joseph's right to Davidic claims even though Joseph did not father Jesus. The Zerubbabel affair happened about 450 years before the occasion of Jesus' baptism. This demonstrates that God is the One Who ensures the Messianic hope passes through the centuries. That is the hope by which we should live life. Sure it appears that justice is dead in the world and it appears that evil gains more strength each day. However, we know that God is in control and Jesus will return for us at exactly the right time.

The second half of verse 27 through the first half of verse 31 describes Jesus as the Messiah of mystery. From Neri through Nathan, we can't identify any of these guys in history. However, Luke makes sure to place them in the genealogy of Jesus. The author of the New Testament book Hebrews identifies Jesus as a priest in the order of Melchizedik. The name Melchizedik means the king of righteousness and he was king of Salem which means peace. He is a mystery man who appears out of nowhere once and never appears again. Abraham had just won a great

battle and rescued his nephew Lot and a whole city. On the way back, he meets a priest. Listen to the event:

“18Then Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought him bread and wine. 19Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20And blessed be God Most High, who has helped you conquer your enemies.’ Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered” (Genesis 14:18-20 / NLT).

And then in a Messianic Psalm, King David refers to Jesus like this:

“4 The LORD has taken an oath and will not break his vow: ‘You are a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek.’ 5The Lord stands at your right hand to protect you. He will strike down many kings in the day of his anger. 6He will punish the nations and fill them with their dead; he will shatter heads over the whole earth” (Psalm 110:4-6 / NLT).

There is quite a bit of mystery that surrounds Jesus, His ministry while He was here on earth and a lot of mystery that surrounds His Second Coming. However, we know there will be blessings for those He finds faithful and judgment for those who have rejected Him.

The Messiah Of The Jews (31b-34a)

These next names are identical in both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. The second half of verse 31 through the first half of verse 34 clearly demonstrates that Jesus was the messiah of the Jews. Some manuscripts of lesser authority add the names Admin and Arni between the names of Ram and Hezron in verse 33.

The Jews had waited for the Messiah from the time of Abraham. Listen to the promise God made to Abraham:

“2I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. 3I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you” Genesis 12:2-3 / NLT).

Jesus will attribute many of the Messianic Psalms to Himself. This is clearly the One Israel was waiting for. However, Jesus will disappoint them because they were looking for a political messiah, not One Who would become the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

The Messiah Of All Humankind (34b-38)

And that brings us to the second half of verse 34 through verse 38 in identifying Jesus as the Messiah of all humankind. Matthew stopped at Abraham but Luke goes all the way back to Adam. In other words, Jesus came to save all humankind. His primary mission was to His chosen people the Jews, but ultimately His sacrificial death was for all who would submit to His

Lordship. There is no doubt what Luke is claiming in this genealogy. JESUS WAS THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

IV. SUMMARY

God the Father and God the Holy Spirit identified themselves with Jesus God the Son. The genealogy demonstrated that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. The question for us is this. Are we willing to identify with Jesus? JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO RESCUE AND REDEEM THOSE WHO WOULD IDENTIFY WITH HIM. Earlier I quoted from the Gospel of John where it described Jesus coming to His own but being rejected by His own. But John went on to say this:

“12But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan—this rebirth comes from God” (John 1:12-13 / NLT).

Listen to Bruce Larson’s summary of this passage:

“Charles T. Leber, one of the great missionary leaders in the Presbyterian Church, tells about being in Westphalia, Germany, at a clinic for very handicapped children. He arrived the day after a very wealthy businessman had visited, a man whom it was hoped would contribute money to the work. On his tour, he said to the doctor, ‘These are very pathetic children. What ratio of cures do you get? How many ever go back to a normal life?’ ‘Well, about one in one hundred,’ was the reply. The businessman was surprised. ‘One in one hundred,’ he repeated. ‘It’s not worth it.’ The doctor corrected him gently, ‘Yes, it is. If that one was your child it would be worth it.’ We are special to God. If you were the only person in the universe who responded, God would still consider the incarnation, the atonement, and the resurrection worthwhile.”

How can we take this lightly in any way? Jesus chose to identify with us so He could die for our sins. What is stopping any of us from identifying with Him? His arms are open to all who will believe in Him and receive Him as Lord and Savior. Are you willing to identify with Christ’s death? He died for us.