

“Becoming Like Jesus the Son” | Luke 3:21—4:3 (Becoming Like the Real Jesus, Together)

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(Discussion questions on page 8)

In a hallway at Marymount University, I noticed a poster with the question, “What Does It Mean to Live a Fulfilling Life?” Sticky notes were provided for answers, a few of which read:

Just go for it; Live with no regrets; Love yourself; To have a smile; To do what makes you happy; To accomplish all your goals; To live authentically...open to your vulnerabilities, loving all, serving all; and, my favorite, a note with one word, fish.

What a great question. What is a fulfilling, authentic human life? Mere survival doesn’t cut it for homo sapiens; we want purpose, meaning, a sense of becoming everything we were made to be.

A unique claim of Christianity is that no human has ever lived a perfectly fulfilling and authentic life, except one. The rest of us, created “to be like God and bear His image” (Gen 1:26-27), have all “fallen short” (Rom 3:23).

There is one human, however, who was perfect: “the image of the invisible God,” Paul says; “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” adds the book of Hebrews (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). Perhaps Christianity’s most radical yet culturally relevant claim today is that Jesus Christ is the True Human, who if we look to, will answer our deepest questions about who we are and what we are made for.

Over the next four weeks we will take four “looks” at Jesus, noticing four features of his humanness: **(1) Sonship**—Jesus is the son of God, revealing that to be human is to receive identity and purpose from God our Father; **(2) Servanthood**—Jesus is a servant, revealing the essence of human vocation as serving God and others; **(3) The Glorious One**—Jesus has a moral beauty, revealing holiness as what makes humans truly glow; **(4) The Heavenly Man**—Jesus lived on earth with a heavenly mind and now has a heavenly, imperishable body, revealing that true humanness lives in light of heaven and eternity.

We begin with Jesus the Son.

Scarcely a page goes by in the Gospels where we are not told that Jesus is a son. He is the son of Mary and Joseph, the son of David, the son of Abraham, the son of Man, the son of the Most High, the Son of God. Sonship indicates both Jesus’ relationship to family and his people, and also his unique relationship to God and office as Messiah.

Luke 3:21-4:3

I want to draw our attention to a section of Luke's Gospel, at the hinge of Jesus' turn to public ministry, where his sonship comes to the fore. In Luke 3 and 4, Jesus is baptized (3:21-22), his genealogy recorded (3:23-38), then his confrontation with the devil (4:1-3ff). The theme of sonship is highlighted throughout.

Following baptism, God the Father says to Jesus, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased" (3:22). Next, in Jesus' family tree, the term "**son**" is used 77 times, most notably with Jesus not only the son of Joseph, David, and Abraham, but "the son of Adam, the son of God" (3:38). Then Jesus is led into the wilderness and confronted by the Devil, who opens his interrogation, "If you are the Son of God..." (4:1-3).

Many themes identity converge when referring to Jesus as "son": as the son, Jesus is David's heir and the Messiah; as the Son of God, Jesus represents what Israel was supposed to be, a nation at times referred to as God's son ("Out of Egypt I called my son," Hos 11.1; cf. Matt 2:15). As the son of God, Jesus is compared to Adam, who, created in the image of God, was supposed to function on earth as God's representative, as sons in the ancient world represented their father.

What should we make of this theme of sonship in terms of how it displays Jesus' humanness? What might it reveal about the essence of being human?

Though we are not all called to Jesus' office as Son of David in the sense of being the Lord of God's Kingdom, we are each offered the possibility of being sons and daughters of God. This is at the heart of the Gospel:

.... to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (Jn 1:12).

.... you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8:15-16).

With this section of Luke before us, Jesus' sonship tells us that to be human involves these three things, being **(1) From God; (2) Like God; and (3) Loved by God.**

I. From God

We often look backwards to understand who we are—to where we come from, our family tree.

Luke does this with Jesus' genealogy (3:23-38), highlighting that an essential part of Jesus' sonship is his connection to a family and a people: Jesus is from somewhere and from someone.

Jesus is from a nuclear family: Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph (3:23). Jesus is from a kingdom, the kingdom of Israel as noted by being the "son of David" (3:31). And Jesus is from an ethnic people, he is the "son

of Abraham” (3:34). Jesus is from *a people and a place*, and as the case for any of us, this informs his identity.

Started by a few Brigham Young Students, **Ancestry.com** sold to Blackstone Group in 2020 for nearly 5 billion dollars. Its success can only be explained by our abiding desire to know from whom and from where we each come.

I was gifted an Ancestry.com kit this Christmas, and will admit that when I mailed off my kit, I was quite curious. I was even more excited when the email showed up in with results. Not only did it show the general countries where my ancestors where from, but it zoomed in on some specific areas.

I was surprised how quickly the excitement wore off. Perhaps being 40% Scottish and 30% Irish explains why I don’t tan better—but does it really tell me who I am, why I’m here, what my purpose is?

Here is where we need to pay attention to the most unique feature of Luke’s genealogy. While Matthew’s genealogy bookends with Abraham, Luke’s goes past Abraham into a much older world, locating Jesus’ origins not only in Adam, but God: Jesus is “the son of Adam, the son of God” (v38).

We all need to take our family tree back this far—back to the voice of God. To be human is to understand that you come, ultimately, *from God*—not merely from a particular family or people, and certainly not from a cosmic accident or primordial force; humans come from God.

There are two points to draw out about being *from God*:

Authority of Creator

First, it situates our story of origins under the authority of God the **Creator**. We don’t just have parents and a people; we have a Maker. This means we are creatures; we have been designed according to the purpose and intelligence of God. Our identity—who we are, what we are for—is therefore something we received, not manufacture.

Particularly for younger people today, human identity has become a matter of strict possessiveness: you are who you decide to be. The idea of anyone telling you otherwise is to violate your rights. It is further assumed that we have limitless freedom to be or become whoever we please—identity is a do-it-yourself project based on self-discovery and self-expression. This has produced not confidence but fragility. It turns out that amid the mysteries and vicissitudes of life, anchoring something as significant as *who you are* in *how you feel* has proved inadequate.

If we are from God and designed by him, then freedom and joy are found in living in accordance with that design, within these limits. And if we are from God, our identity is never more secure than when it is announced by His voice, not ours—“this is my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased. Jesus’s sonship says that *who we are* is a matter of *whose we are*.

Story of Author

Being *from God* not only situates us before God as Maker, but also as Author—He is writing us into His story. Flowing through all of history the providential plan of God. Jesus does not model the modern idea of writing your own story, but the truer ideal of fulfilling your part in God's Story.

To be a son of Adam is to be thrown into a battle with sin. To be a son of Abraham and David is to be invited into God's plan of conquering sin and redeeming the world. This is *The Story*, and true life is found when we play the role God has given us in it.¹

Jesus the son shows us that we are *from God*, grounding our identity in God the Creator, and inviting us into the rest of knowing that God is writing a story, and has written us into it:

Who we are is whose we are; where we are is where He has us.

If you are a teenager, wrestling with questions of identity, I'd encourage you to focus most on what God says about you, and to find His voice speaking over you in His Word. Reflecting on your own baptism in light of Jesus' baptism is a good place to start.

If you are someone who feels lost in life, struggling to understand how events have unfolded, I'd encourage you—in your surrender to God—to remember that your Maker is also The Author, and knows exactly what is going on and precisely why He has you where you currently are—and in His Story, for His sons and daughters, he is “working all things together for good” (Rom 8:28).²

Second, Jesus' sonship tells us that he is to be *like God*.

II. Like God

Sometimes people call a son a “chip off the old block” because he acts like his father. In the ancient world, it was a given that a son was to be like the father—trained in the same vocation, called to take over the family business. The son reflected what the father was like.

Being like God the father was implied in the description of our creation—“in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1).

We reflect his image in many ways: our intellect, moral intuitions, wisdom spiritual capacity, and our ability to have dominion over creation, creatively bringing forth its potential. Jesus reflects God's image in all these ways.

¹ Many thinkers have observed that the human self can only really understand life in the form of a narrative, or story. We connect the otherwise disparate parts of our lives by seeing them as part of a story—a story of becoming, or achieving, or finding ourselves. What connects the older you to the younger you is not necessarily the cells in your body—many of which are regularly replaced. It is the story you understand yourself to be living.

² “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son....” (Rom 8:28-29).

There is another aspect of God's nature the Jesus reflects that I want to highlight—and this is God's *relational nature*. The Triune God exists eternally in relationship—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, together in a bond of love.

Notice that Jesus is never alone: He is either relating to others, his disciples or family, or he is off praying to his Father. He is a man who is never alone. His relational nature is highlighted negatively during his suffering on the Cross—abandoned by family, friends and finally (so it seemed) His Father. Death, for Jesus, is being cut off from all relationships.

This relational feature of Jesus' sonship should not surprise us: a Son wants to be with His Father; and a son wants to be with his brothers and sisters. But when we probe deeper, we see that Jesus is reflecting the image of the triune God.³

Human Being, is being in relationship. Relationships are integral both to our formation and fulfillment.

Formed by Relationships

In his very helpful book, *How to Find Yourself: Why Looking Inward Is Not the Answer*, Brian Rosner refers to humans as “social animals” and notes that relationships with others shapes us:

You were largely formed by your parents. Your thoughts are not entirely your own. Your behavior is shaped by the company you keep.⁴

Have you ever noticed that you pick up the mannerism of a friend, or that your voice sounds like the people you grew up with; have you reckoned with how strongly a friend group can shape how you think—for better or worse?

Notice that Jesus is shaped in his speaking and acting by closeness to His Father:

“What I say, I say as the Father has told me” (Jn 12:50); “The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.... For the Father loves the son, and shows him all that he himself is doing” (Jn 5:19).

If Jesus' is shaped by closeness to His Father, so too must we.

Fulfilled by Relationships

Relationships not only shape Jesus, but fulfill him. The Devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms in the world; but he turns them down in exchange for keeping his closeness to God. Jesus is not about

³ In his study, *The Image of God in Man*, David Cairns asserts, ‘It is the individual-in-the-community—rather than the community itself—that is in the image of God.’” (David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man*. London: SCM, 1953, 44.)

⁴ Rosner, 85-86.

collecting stuff; he's about gaining friends and family. His prayer in John 17 is a window into what drove him:

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (Jn 17:24).

As the Son, Jesus is like God in many ways. One of these is seen in his inherently relational nature—he is shaped by closeness to the Father, who he watches at his work and listens to his words. And he is satisfied and grounded by his closeness to the Father and his friends, his disciples.

Apply: It is natural at times to prize adventure and freedom in life, or work and achievement. But as a human being, what matters to your nature most is *connection*—thick bonds of union with God and people you love. Order your life accordingly.

As we move toward closing, we note one last feature of sonship which began to emerge in the previous point about relationality: to be a son, is to be loved.

III. Loved by God

The love that the father has for Jesus comes to the fore in the baptism scene: “This is my beloved son; with him I am well pleased” (3:22). Jesus is being anointed and prepared for his ministry here. But it is striking that rather than just sending the Spirit to empower him, God also sends his voice, to state publicly his pleasure with the Son.

We don't want to over-sentimentalize this scene, but it surely must have touched the heart of Jesus. And it is the case that inherent to sonship is a need to be evaluated, and found desirable, by our heavenly Father. C.S. Lewis calls this the need for the “**divine accolade**,” the “specific pleasure of the inferior” wanting to hear the praise of the superior:

the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator.... the satisfaction of having pleased those whom I rightly loved and rightly feared.⁵

People are searching for this “well done” from the Father in so many ways—and often don't even come close to understanding the nature of his ache.

Can we, like Jesus, know the pleasure of the father?

The Gospel says we can. In our sin and rebellion, we have come under the displeasure—the wrath of God (Rom 1:17-25; Eph 2:1-3). But through the work of Jesus, who acting as our Great

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 36, 40-41.

Brother, takes our sin upon himself and pays its penalty, we can then stand before God forgiven, cleansed, made new. As Paul, thinking of our conversion and baptism, explains:

you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom 8:14-16).

Did you know what it is like to have at the core of your being this infusion of love from God?

It is like the young boy who made himself a paper boat and sailed it in a stream behind his house. But one day lost the boat to a rushing current. Weeks went by and he couldn’t find his boat. Then one day while walking through town, he passed the toy store and there in the window, for sale for 2 dollars, was his boat. He raced home, broke open his piggy bank, ran to the store and put all the change he had before the manager and bought back his boat. Taking it outside to a grassy hill near the stream he sat down on a bench, held it in his hands, and said: ““I made you, and you were mine; but I lost you. But now I found you and I bought you back. You are *twice* mine.”

This the word that the Father speaks of Jesus’ brothers and sisters today. Not only did he make us in love, but he has rescued us in his mercy and grace.

Here, then, is our first look at true humanness by looking at Jesus. In his sonship, Jesus tells us that to be human is to be *from God, like God, and loved by God*. Put another way, to be human is to know we come from and are created by God; that like God we are social beings made for relationships; and—as a flower needs the sun—our hearts need to know the love of our Father.

Small Group Questions

1. We often skip over or skim the genealogies in the Bible, but they are important. Why do you think Luke takes Jesus' genealogy past Abraham all the way back to "son of Adam, son of God" (Lk 3:38)? What does this stress about who Jesus is.
2. Immediately after Jesus' genealogy tells us he is "son of Adam, son of God" (Lk 3:38), Jesus is led into the wilderness where the devil begins his temptation with, "if you are the son of God" (Lk 4:3). What might this sequence of events—son of Adam who is from God→immediately confronted by the temptation of Satan—call to mind? Think of the flow of Genesis 1-3, where humankind is made in God's image (Gen 1-2) then immediately confronted by Satan (Gen 3). How does Jesus' confrontation with the Devil differ from Adam and Eve's? What might this comparison of Jesus to the first Adam tell us about Jesus?
3. Have you ever done a family tree, or something like Ancestry.com? How does Jesus' genealogy, running back to "son of Adam, son of God," impact how you think of your own? How does faith in Christ impact your notion of your family and ancestry (consider passages such as Galatians 3:29, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise")?
4. How do you think about your identity, the question, *who am I*? How do you think about the question of what story you are living? How does Jesus' sonship—and the Gospel's promise that we are adopted as God's sons and daughters (Rom 8:14-17)—impact how you think about *who you are* and *where you are*?