

Women's Bible Study Fall 2011

Who Do YOU Say I Am? *A study of the names and character of Christ.*

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***He is Son of God and Son of Man
(Luke 3:21-22 and Luke 19:1-9)***

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I know that some of you in this room are suffering. You're going through dreadful heartaches. There are broken relationships. Broken hearts. Broken bodies. And you come to a topic like *He is Son of God and Son of Man*, and you're asking yourselves what this has to do with your life right now.

Here's the difference that it makes. We have a God who entered into our human sorrows by becoming human. He's not remote. He walked through betrayal, and grief, and shame. He knows firsthand terrible physical pain. So there is nothing that we experience here that he hasn't been through.

That's the difference it makes to have a Savior God who is also Emmanuel, God with us. He's not just a sympathetic friend. He's an empathetic deity. But because he is God, he is able to do something about our pain. So if you're suffering today, listen to each word of scripture remembering that he was one of us, the Son of Man and Son of God.

Today we will look at two very different passages from Luke's gospel. The first happens at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, and can be found in Luke chapter 3 beginning with verse 21. Please turn there now with me, and we'll look first at

Jesus as

I. The Son of God (Luke 3:21-22)

We need to remember that Jesus is the Son of God, the One and Only, not just "a son of God" or a holy man. Luke tells us how we know this to be true. Look at v. 21:

"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" (Luke 3:21-22)

So why was the sinless Son of God baptized? John was preaching a baptism of repentance for sins, telling Jews that it wasn't enough to be a child of Abraham – that Jews needed to repent and be baptized as a sign of their true acceptance before God. This was the complete opposite of the smug entitlement of the Pharisees.

Only converts to Judaism were ever baptized. Otherwise, Jews were born Jews. If a Gentile wished to convert, he or she had to undergo a form of baptism – interestingly, in "living water" – water which was flowing through a pool, not static.

But John the Baptist told a different story. He preached that you needed to repent. The act of baptism was an outward symbol of an inward brokenness that had already taken place. Because of his powerful ministry the kingdom of God was on the move in Israel.

Jesus recognizes that God is calling him to “go public”, and so he steps up with the crowd to be baptized. Isaiah prophesied that “he was numbered with the transgressors”, (Isaiah 53:12) and we usually apply that to Jesus’ crucifixion, when he’s hanging between two thieves. But here he is at the beginning of his ministry, “numbering himself with the transgressors” even though Jesus himself is without sin.

After the baptism, while Jesus was praying, God spoke and Jesus was

A. Identified by God as his Son

God says, ‘You are my Son, whom I love.’ This is a reference to Psalm 2:7, written about the coming Messiah, who would also be King. It would have been a familiar scripture, full of meaning to the Jews who heard it.

Jesus was about 30 at this time. There were angels and wise men at Jesus’ birth. Then there was the odd incident in the Temple when Jesus was 12. But from age 12 to 30 we hear nothing from the carpenter in Nazareth, who is working at his trade, supporting his family, and waiting for God’s call. Then John the Baptist arises and a huge spiritual movement sweeps the land. It’s time for Jesus to make himself known.

Hebrews says:

“In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” (Hebrews 1:2-3)

Jesus is God’s Son and his representative in the world. The world now needs to know who he is. So at the time of his baptism God makes Jesus’ identity known by speaking aloud.

Then there was a second sign, as Jesus was

B. Anointed by the Spirit

The crowd not only heard the voice of God but saw the Holy Spirit come down like a dove out of heaven and alight on Jesus. Like the Transfiguration later on, this was a moment when the veil between heaven and earth was temporarily ripped away.

Anointing was done in the Old Testament by pouring oil on the head of the priest or the king. It was an acknowledgement of God’s choice on that person. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit anointed people with blessing. Here, the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus with power for the public ministry that is coming.

But that’s not all. In addition to being identified and anointed, Jesus is also

C. Approved by God

Perhaps those of you with children or grandchildren know the strange experience of loving them but not actually *approving* of what they're doing. But God states both his love and his approval of his Son Jesus when he says, "With you I am well pleased." This is a second O.T. quote, from Isaiah 42:1, which refers to the Suffering Servant. Now Jesus is marked as the bearer of Kingship and Servanthood, which is exactly the ministry he goes on to have.

In Luke's two verses we have a clear picture of Jesus, fully God, in complete union with the Trinity of God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son. But the difficulty in understanding him comes from what theologians call the "hypostatic union" – being fully Man, with a sinless human nature, while at the same time being fully God, with a divine nature. Two natures in one, but completely harmonious. We've just seen that he's the Son of God. To illustrate Jesus as the Son of Man, let's look at our second passage today. Please turn with me to Luke 19, beginning with v. 1, where we see

II. The Son of Man (Luke 19:1-9)

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, 'He has gone to be the guest of a "sinner".' But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possession to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.'

Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.'" (Luke 19:1-9)

This isn't just a child's story. It's a real occurrence between two real, historical persons – Zacchaeus and Jesus.

Jericho was one of the richest towns around. The historian Josephus called it the "fattest city in Palestine." It's now a ruin, but in 1981 I saw an astoundingly beautiful mosaic floor which had been excavated from one of the Roman villas. It was very grand in its day, and Zacchaeus lived in that day. Jericho was at the center of major trade routes and the Roman officials who taxed all that trade were sitting pretty. Zacchaeus wasn't a simple tax collector like Matthew – he was an overseer, a Chief Tax Collector whose minions did the actual tax collecting while all the money flowed through his hands and back to Rome. Whether or not Zacchaeus was a cheater by nature, it would have been difficult not to skim off some of that great wealth. And the poor Jews on whose backs the tax was taken were resentful of this short, wealthy man who lived among them – but they probably feared him as well as ridiculed him.

In fact, it was quite brave of Zacchaeus to venture out in a hostile crowd. No wonder he couldn't push his way to the front to see. On the contrary, he was probably receiving surreptitious elbows and kicks as he moved through the crowd. But he was determined. Being resourceful, he spotted a sycamore-fig tree and climbed it to get a better look. These are famous for being great climbing trees. Their branches start low to the ground so even a child (or a short man like Zacchaeus) can get up to the first branch and start climbing. And that's what he did – sat in a tree branch looking over the heads of everyone else, until suddenly Jesus stood beneath him and called him by name. Jesus didn't just invite himself to Zacchaeus' house...he said "***I must*** come to your house today." It was a command that Zacchaeus couldn't ignore.

The people began muttering about this. Jesus had bypassed everyone else and taken up with the despised tax guy. The word "muttering" here is the same word used of the Israelites in the Exodus, often translated "murmuring" or "grumbling". It's an ugly word. But Zacchaeus responded joyfully nonetheless.

So here we see the first characteristic of the Son of Man.

He

A. Identifies with us

Let me put this into terms we can all relate to. Boots the cat is an eccentric member of our household. He's recently taken to sneaking into the linen closet where I will find him shedding dander on the towels. Several of our family members, who shall go unnamed, have the habit of talking to him. Well, I will divulge that one of them has an English accent and speaks so loudly to the cat that I often think there's an extra person upstairs, as I hear what sounds like an animated conversation. But I know perfectly well that our cat understands just two sounds: his name, "Boots", and the noise of the spoon scraping catfood onto the plate. It's not so much Boots' intellect that's the problem here, although our daughter describes him as 'having the IQ of a turnip', but even the smartest feline can't grasp English. No, if we wanted to really communicate with Boots we'd have to learn to speak cat. What's more, we'd have to look and smell like a cat in order to have Boots deign to give us his attention. To relate to a cat, you have to become a cat. To reach a human, you have to become a human. And that is what Jesus Christ did. There was a wide gap between a holy God and sinful man, so how did Jesus bridge the gap?

Well, he made himself poor so he could relate to the poor:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Cor. 8:9) Paul doesn't just mean poor materially, although Jesus did indeed do that. Rather, he laid aside the riches of heaven in order to make himself like us.

He made himself human, as a servant, without the trappings of human power.

"...but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:7-8) Jesus could have made himself into an earthly king – the greatest monarch ever to walk the earth – but instead he came as a servant, so that people with eyes to see would perceive him accurately, rather than being drawn to him because of power or wealth.

He made himself ordinary, so that people would be attracted to his spirit and not to any physical beauty.

“...he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him...” (Is. 53:2) There was nothing obvious about Jesus that would have caused the great loyalty of his followers. But for those who understood who he was, he became beautiful, and they followed him.

Jesus identified with an outcast like Zacchaeus and befriended him. He called him by name. As the Son of Man he also identifies with and befriends us.

As the Son of Man he also

B. Seeks and finds us

This was the year that I lost things. It started when I was on a one day trip to the Scilly Isles (yes, I know that sounds funny, but that’s really what they’re called). They are a tiny chain of islands off the coast of Cornwall. After we returned home that night I realized that I had lost a diamond earring. This was part of a pair of earrings given to me by John in 1988. Not only were they very meaningful as a gift, but they were also my favorite earrings and I had worn them around the world through many travels. But because I had lost them on an island, I couldn’t go back and look.

Two weeks later I lost another earring. This one was silver, and it was also a gift from John brought back from India one year. I lost it on the beach at North Carolina.

You’d think I would learn by that experience not to wear earrings on holiday, but no. I lost a third pair, also a gift, when I put them in my tent pocket at night and then shook out the tent before packing it the next morning. So my nice gold earrings were flung into the dirt somewhere along the John Muir trail.

But I realized last Friday that I had lost something more irreplaceable than jewelry. As I was packing to go to the hermitage that I visit twice a year for 24 hours of solitude and silence, I discovered that I had lost my Solitude journal – five or six years of chronicling my thoughts twice a year. Not only does it is a spiritual journal, but it also pretty well captured family life during that time period. It’s the only journal I keep, and I update it just twice a year. So this was a big blow to me.

What do you do when you’ve mislaid something? First you look where it’s supposed to be. Then you look where it’s NOT supposed to be (and in my house, that often turns up the lost object). Then you look everywhere, in all the improbable places, and try to think back on where it could be. And, sometimes, you just give up and realize that it’s gone for good. Not only have you wasted hours looking, but for no gain.

I find losing something a particularly bitter experience. It’s a great occasion to berate myself for the unorganized state of my files and drawers. But it does help me identify with the passages on “lostness” that are found in Luke 15. Here’s one of them:

“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home.” (Luke 15:4-6)

Sheep are not particularly endearing. They're quite dumb. They usually follow the leader but there's generally one who determinedly busts out of the enclosure and can be found grazing on the road. We see this all the time in England, and sometimes it's a young lamb who cannot figure out how to get back through the fence to its mum. Outside of the fence, they're in danger from cars and predators. Usually what takes a sheep outside the fence is the desire for some special vegetation. So they graze themselves right into peril. So the shepherd has to find the lost sheep and bring it back. It's a lovely picture; the shepherd hoists the sheep onto his strong shoulders and carries it home rejoicing. By that time the sheep is probably too tired or distressed to be led home – they need to be picked up and carried.

Jesus told these parables about lost items to get his audience to understand how important, and action-generating, lostness is to God. One commentator says that we need to remember the N.T. meaning of lost in this context is “in the wrong place” rather than “irredeemable”. As lost sheep we've wandered away from our Shepherd; now we're in danger and distress and he seeks us and finds us in order to bring us home.

You know, it's kind of nice to know that someone is looking for us when we're lost. And the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

There's another thing that the Son of Man does for us.

He

C. Transforms us by the Spirit

Paul wrote,

**“...if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”
(Romans 8:9)** It's an identifying mark.

When the Son of Man seeks and finds us, he transforms us through the Holy Spirit. The reason we know something really happened to Zaccheus is that his life changed. True repentance affects our behavior. We might struggle to change old habits, but true repentance gives us a revulsion for our former sins that stops us from sinning in the future.

Notice that Zaccheus confessed his sins publicly. There's no going back once you stand up and make a public promise or confession, and that's why it's such a powerful thing to give a faith story. You're going on the record. You are now accountable to your hearers.

I'm impressed that Zacchaeus stayed where he was, in Jericho, and made right what he had done wrong. He could have followed Jesus to Jerusalem, and left his sinful mess behind, but he stayed and became part of the solution. All too often we walk away from our messes rather than stay and sort them out. Jesus' transforming power gives us the strength to heal our brokenness.

Zaccheus also goes the extra mile in what he's offering. According to Levitical law, making it right would have meant restoring what he'd stolen plus what it was worth – in other words, twice over. But Zaccheus is offering 4 times what he's cheated on. In addition to that, he's promising to give half of his considerable wealth to the poor. So far as we can see from the text, this is a voluntary response from Zaccheus because he's been transformed.

Just one chapter earlier Jesus told a story about a rich young man who was willing to do anything except give up his riches. And the story concludes with Jesus saying, “**How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.**” (Luke 18:23). But that sad comment is not the end of the story. The bystanders asked who can be saved, and Jesus replied: “**What is impossible with men is possible with God.**” (Luke 18: 27) The story of Zaccheus in chapter 19 proves Jesus’ words. Zaccheus is very wealthy, but upon encountering Jesus he gives up his treasure and makes restoration for his cheating. What is impossible with men is indeed possible with God.

Not all of us experience that instantaneous transformation. But we should all undergo SOME kind of transformation when we enter into relationship with Christ.

Which leads us to the next question -

III. How do we know?

How do we really know

A. When we’re being sought by God?

God doesn’t usually shout our name, although that happened to Zacchaeus. No, it’s usually more subtle, so here are 5 signs that God might be trying to get your attention – that he is actively seeking you.

- **First, Dissatisfaction with life**

If you think you’ve seen all there is of life and you’re bored or disappointed, you might be setting yourself up for an encounter with God – who is never boring nor disappointing.

- **Second, Curiosity about God**

Many people are able to completely ignore Christians, the church, the question of evil and so on. But if you are a thinker you might have some unsatisfied curiosity about God, and that’s a sign that he is seeking you.

A third sign is feeling a

- **Pull towards his people**

Sometimes it’s Christians themselves who are so winsomely attractive to be with that we start to wonder, Why are you so different? And maybe we think, I’d like to be like you. Or, I’d like to have a family like yours. Or a peace like yours, or a joy like yours. Instead of seeing Christians as self-important killjoys, we are drawn to them.

A fourth sign that we’re being sought by God is

- **Revulsion for our sins**

This is a tough one, because being revolted by our sins usually comes ahead of being able to actually DO anything about them. But if you’re feeling ashamed of what used to come naturally, whether that’s drinking yourself into a stupor or backstabbing your best friend, it might be that God is flicking your conscience. We all have one, but because we’re fallen, we can’t successfully live by it until Christ becomes our Lord. So revulsion or shame can be a sign that God is seeking us.

And finally, sometimes we encounter God in

- **Something we can’t explain**

Perhaps something you're dreading didn't come to pass – that cancer diagnosis that went away, or that divorce that didn't happen, and you realize that it cannot be explained by normal experience. Someone narrowly misses broadsiding you in the intersection. You stop and think, 'Maybe someone's looking out for me.' Perhaps God is seeking your attention.

Some of you are experiencing one or more of those signs right now. And if you are, don't ignore them. God is seeking you and he will eventually find you. That is part of the beauty of being loved by your Creator, who seeks and saves the lost.

But perhaps we come to Jesus and start out well, but we're just as angry and mixed up as before. So now it's time to ask ourselves, how do we know

B. When we've been found

What are the unmistakable signs that we've been **found** by God?

▪ **First, we ask.**

The Son of Man is a Person. We must invite him to become part of our lives. Although he seeks us and draws us to himself he doesn't force himself on us. He seeks us. We ask him into our lives.

▪ **Second, we change.**

The truest mark of being found by God is significant change in our lives. It doesn't happen overnight. Alcoholics will probably still be alcoholics. Adulterers will still be adulterers, in the sense that they'll still be experiencing the consequences of their actions. But there will be a change. The alcoholic will now rely on the grace of God and take steps to fight their addiction. The adulterer will put away the wrong relationship and try to make amends in their marriage. Change should be visible, even if it's slow. Although our new nature is instantaneous, our old habits are entrenched. Salvation happens in an instant. And sanctification takes a lifetime. Yet change is a huge indication of God's transforming work in our lives.

Just look at Zacchaeus. He promised publicly to restore what he'd cheated on and to give half his wealth to the poor. But it was probably hard the next time the tax revenues passed through his hands to keep them in his pockets and not take what he'd taken in the past. By God's grace and with the help of the Holy Spirit we can die to those old sinful habits, and that is where change takes place.

And finally, an unmistakable mark of being found by God is that

▪ **We forgive**

We forgive, because we know what it's like to be forgiven. Forgiveness is something that the world cannot explain and is stunned by when it happens. Gladys Staines publicly forgave the terrorists who burned her missionary husband and their two young sons to death in their car in India in xxxx. Forgiveness releases the one who pardons from bitterness, anger and revenge, and it frees the one who offended, allowing them to change and move on. Forgiveness comes from God, who forgave us. And it is one of the greatest marks of a changed life.

I am thankful that the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. There was a time in my life when I heard an audible voice, which I believe was from God, speak to me. He said, "That

which is lost shall be found.” At the time I was in great distress over the spiritual condition of someone I love. That one statement gave me enormous peace as I continued to pray over a period of years, now with a sense of confidence about the outcome. We cannot see the future. But we do know that God loves to answer prayers like this with a resounding Yes. And if we remember that being lost is simply being in the wrong place, then they belong with God and Christ will return them to their rightful place.

Once we’ve been found, we need to remember that the Son of Man, who came to seek and save the lost, asks us to do his work in the world. So it becomes our privilege to help seek and save the lost as well. Maybe someone around you is going through one of those five indicators that God is seeking her. Step into the gap – take her to church – answer questions. The mark of Jesus’ sonship was obedience to God. And we are also his children if we obey what he commands.

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