

## Preventing an Identity Crisis

Luke 4:1-13

As some of you may know, my mom is battling advanced stage Alzheimer's. When my siblings and I found out about it a year ago, we were shocked. We were shocked because the symptoms seemed to come on so suddenly. Watching my mom slipping away, has been one of the most difficult things we've ever experienced. And what's so heart-wrenching is not simply that she's losing her memory, but that she's losing her identity. She's not herself, she's not mom.

My mom found much of her identity in the love her children have for her and her love for them. But because her memory is going she is having a hard time recognizing who we are and more so the sense of who she is. Consequently, she's depressed and anxious most of the time. This disease is also affecting her moral compass. Last time I was with her she looked at me with anguish and with tears in her eyes she said, "I want to die."

You know, what hurts the most is not that my mom is forgetting who I am, but the profound sadness that she displays constantly because she's losing herself.

I want to suggest to you that the most fearful, sorrowful, and insecure state to be in is not knowing who you are, not knowing your identity because you don't know where you are, where you came from or who you belong to. And this can happen not only through a physical disease like Alzheimer's, but through spiritual neglect or deception.

**Main idea:** Satan's primary strategy for weakening our faith is to attack our identity in Christ. To defeat him we must maintain our intimacy with Christ.

To unfold this theme, we are going to examine how the devil attacked the identity of Jesus that His Father affirmed at His baptism, and what Jesus did to resist Him.

Now before we look at the interaction between Jesus and devil, keep in mind that before Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil, He was baptized by John. And at His baptism, a voice from heaven, God's voice, was heard saying to Jesus, *"you are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* Luke 3:22b

We see here that before the start of His public ministry, God's spoke directly to Jesus and affirmed who He was--affirmed that He was His *beloved Son*. As we learned in previous messages, understanding His identity as God's Son, and living accordingly, was essential to the carrying out of His Father's will and fulfilling His redemptive purposes.

And because the Son of God became the Son of man and fulfilled His Father's will, sons and daughters of men can become adopted sons and daughters of God. And like Christ, knowing our identity in Christ and living accordingly, is key to living a fruitful Christian life.

So, knowing how essential it is to know our true identity in Christ to thrive humanly and spiritually, the devil's primary work is to tempt us to find our identity in anything but our adoption in Christ.

### 1. **Set yourself apart in the wilderness** (silence and solitude)

With this in mind, the first point I want us to see today for overcoming the attacks of the devil on our identity is setting ourselves apart in the wilderness (silence and solitude). After Jesus' baptism and before the start of His public ministry, Luke writes:

*"And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. Luke 3:1-2*

Notice that Jesus, who was fully God and fully man, was led in His humanity by the Holy Spirit. Remember, as He was coming of age, Luke also writes: *"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man"* (Luke 2:52).

Concerning how Jesus progressed in wisdom and divine awareness, one commentator explained: “When he became human he placed the exercise of his divine knowledge and power under the discretion of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11). Therefore, we understand that His human mind progressively acquired a divine awareness as the Father willed it.” Hughes

So, as a boy, Jesus made it a priority to go to His Father’s house and sit with the elders to listen and ask them questions. Moreover, He submitted to His parents, and worked as a carpenter under His father’s tutelage before He began His ministry.

And again, as He was preparing for the start of His public ministry, He was submitted to and led by the Holy Spirit. And Luke states specifically that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for forty days where He fasted and was tempted by the devil.

If you recall, I shared in a recent message some thoughts from John Mark Comer about how the wilderness, where Jesus was led to by the Spirit, was not a place of weakness, but a place of strength. It was a place of strength because the wilderness, which can also be translated desert place, or desolate place, was a quiet place where Jesus could shut Himself away and get alone with God.

Often when we hear about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, it’s emphasized that the devil did so because he might have thought that he was weak. But again, the Spirit didn’t lead him in the wilderness to make Him weak but to strengthen Him before the presence of His Heavenly Father. The desert, where Jesus often resorted to get alone with His Father, didn’t make Jesus less prepared for the attacks of the devil. On the contrary, like His time in the garden of Gethsemane, He was strengthened by His Father.

It was in the place of silence and solitude that Jesus received, as Comer put it, clarity about His identity and calling. He was grounded. Centered. In touch with God and Himself. From that place of

emotional equilibrium and spiritual support, He knew precisely what to say yes to, and just as importantly, what to say no to.”

And again, if this was true of Jesus, if He made time for silence and solitude so that He could get alone with His Father and receive in His humanity what He needed to overcome the schemes of the devil, how much more do we? The Lord said to His people through the Psalmist, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* Psalm 46:10

But the truth is that in this hurried and fast paced world filled with so many online and off-line distractions, many of us struggle to make time to withdraw from all the noise to hear the voice of God. We struggle not only because many of us are addicted to smartphones, television, and other worldly amusements, but we lack holy desire.

When rebuking the disciples who were not able to pray with Him for one hour, Jesus said, “The Spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.” Matt. 26:41

In His classic work, *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer wrote: “I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our present low estate. The stiff and wooden quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people. He waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He waits so long, so very long, in vain.”

Beloved, like a child eating junk food before a family meal, the excessive amount of time we spend on worldly amusement, like TikTok, FaceBook and Instagram is not only consuming the time we can be using for better things, it is killing our desire for holy things.

And this is where fasting comes in. If you lack holy desire, turn off all the noise, put your smartphone away, and practice the discipline of solitude with prayer and fasting. When we fast, we are saying to God that we long to long for Him more than food—that we want to look upon His Face more than we want to check Face Book.

We shouldn't fast only because we are desperate for something from God, but because we are desperate for God Himself. So, when you do fast, set yourself apart, away from all the distractions to seek the face of God until He awakens in you holy longings and desires.

As the late revivalist Leonard Ravenhill exhorted believers in his day: "Go back to the desert! Get [alone]! There's nothing on God's earth like silence. Just take your Bible. Forget everything, and everybody, and shut yourself away, until you have a new revelation from God Himself." Leonard Ravenhill

Can't God speak to us in other ways besides in solitude? God is a good Father and He knows how to get the attention of His children when they're distracted by the world. But as a loving Father, God's preferred method of speaking to our hearts is not in a forceful way.

Remember that the Holy Spirit is likened to a dove. A dove is known for the low, gentle, and peaceful cooing sound that it makes. The predominant characteristic of Jesus who was filled with the Spirit was that He was gentle and lowly. If you want to hear from the Lord, we need a tender and sensitive heart. We need to give God our undivided attention so that we can hear His quiet and gentle voice.

## 2. **Set your mind on the word** (soak in scriptures)

Secondly, to be prepared and equipped to resist the attacks of the enemy, you must set your mind on the word. Having pointed out that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, and that the devil came to tempt Him, Luke writes:

*"The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' 4 And Jesus answered him, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"* Luke 3:3-4'

Notice that the devil prefaces his temptation to Jesus by calling into question His identity as the Son of God. He challenged Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God by miraculously turning a stone into

bread. Additionally, he wanted Jesus, who was fasting, to give into His physical desire to satisfy His hunger.

But Jesus didn't need to prove to the devil or Himself that He was the Son of God by performing miraculous acts. The voice of His Father that He heard at His baptism and no doubt in the quiet of the wilderness, was where Jesus drew all the assurance that He needed.

Additionally, Jesus could overcome the temptation to satisfy His physical hunger at the behest of Satan because the word of God sustained Him—the word of God was food for His soul. What's more, Jesus not only had God's word in His heart, He also wielded the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God to overcome the suggestions of the devil.

Jesus' response to the devil was a quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 which fully reads, *“man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”*

Beloved, in the same way, we must become men and women of the word of God. We must find our deepest identity not in what others say about us or even in what we feel, but in what God's words says about us. As Adrian Rogers put it: “The truest thing about me is what God says about me.” Adrian Rogers

Notice also that the scripture that Jesus used to resist Satan was God's word to the Israelites who were also tested in the wilderness where among other things they also experienced hunger. During those times, rather than trusting God's word, and looking to Him to provide, they grumbled and complained that they were better off in Egypt.

But in contrast, Jesus shows us through His wilderness experience how we can trust God's word to sustain us when our physical desires would otherwise betray us. Even though He had legitimate needs, He didn't give in to the temptation to satisfy them in illegitimate ways.

I really appreciate the applicational insights Kent Hughes observes: “Our temptation may not be to turn stones into bread. The impossible

does not tempt us. However, rather than trusting him, we regularly succumb to the temptation to go beyond the parameters of God's Word to satisfy our personal needs or desires...We are too often overreachers. We promote ourselves because we are sure God will not do it. We scheme and plan for our well-being, assuming that God does not care or maybe does not know our needs. We refuse to live "by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

Beloved, we must resist the temptation to look to our performance to prove our identity or to take matters into our own hands to satisfy our needs. And we resist not only by holding on to God's word in the moment of testing, but by daily setting our minds on the word of God in silence and solitude so that our perspective is renewed—so that when the temptations come we will have the clarity, security, and strength to overcome.

Now knowing that he could not tempt Jesus by appealing to His felt needs because Jesus lived by the word of God, the devil eventually changes tactics. He uses the word of God to tempt Jesus to perform an act outside of God's will. Jumping down to verse 9 Luke writes: *"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, <sup>10</sup> for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you," <sup>11</sup> and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." <sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Luke 3:9-12*

How many of you know, just because somebody can quote a lot of scripture doesn't mean that they are speaking truth. As A.W. Tozer put it, "The devil is a better theologian than any of us and is a devil still." Not only must we know the scriptures, but we must learn to properly apply the word to our lives.

We must never look to the word to try to justify or rationalize our own actions or to manipulate others to act in a way that suits us. This is what the prosperity preachers do all day long. They take promises, for example, that God spoke to the Nation of Israel in the land of promise

and apply them to themselves. Under the Old Covenant, God promised Israel physical and material blessings if they remained faithful to Him. Under the New Covenant, God's word says to the church that although God gives grace to the faithful, they should expect persecution and opposition.

In our text, the devil quotes from Psalm 91 that promised faithful Israel, among other things, protection from diseases and their surrounding enemies. Moreover, God's word in Psalm 91 also promised faithful Israel angelic protection. Satan quoted from this passage to tempt Jesus to act on His own authority.

But although Jesus could call upon a legion of Angels to protect him, He would never act outside of God's will. If God told Him to jump, He would jump, but He would never use God's promises to force God to bless an action that God did not direct. He would not do anything in His own power or will for that would be testing God in a way that would stir His displeasure rather than His favor.

So, Jesus responded to Satan's misuse of God's word by again properly applying God's word from Deuteronomy 6:16: *"And Jesus answered him, 'It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

Beloved, we should never twist God's word to justify our actions or expect God to act in our favor while we are acting outside of His will. Kent Hughes elaborates: "Willful swan dives test the LORD [not out of faith but out of doubt]—[This can be] diving into a marital relationship that does not have the approval of God's Word; misapplying Scripture with disastrous consequences, then crying out for God to catch us before we hit bottom. True, He specializes in picking up the pieces [of our broken lives], but we must not test him through rationalized disobedience."

Rather than testing God by expecting Him to bless our mess, let's trust that His will is always best. Don't get ahead of the Lord. Your Father loves you, He's in control, and His timing is always perfect.



### 3. **Set your heart to worship** (see and savor)

Lastly, you are prepared and equipped to overcome the temptations of the devil as you set your heart to worship.

Again, Satan changes strategies and attempts to shift Jesus' focus from submitting to His Father's will, to allowing him to make the world bow to Jesus. Luke writes: *"And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.""*

How many of you know, one day *at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*. However, before the start of His public ministry, Satan, through some kind of supernatural vision, showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and promised to give Him authority over it all. This offer meant that the kingdoms of the world would give Jesus all their glory and allegiance. All that Jesus had to do was to bow and worship him.

It's important to note here that Satan does not have absolute sovereignty and control over the world; God does! The bible does say that Satan is the god and ruler of this world, but his authority and power is limited.

Nevertheless, his offer to give Jesus the world's allegiance was legitimate. And because Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, the actual temptation was for Jesus to take authority over the kingdoms of this world without having to endure pain, suffering, and death. But to this offer of gaining authority without suffering in exchange for Jesus' worship—in exchange for Jesus recognizing Satan as some kind of worthy authority, Jesus again responded with scripture.

Quoting Deuteronomy 6:13 Jesus said: *"It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.""* Luke 4:8b

Jesus demonstrated His love and devotion to the Father and the supreme worthiness of His Father by refusing to accept a crown without the cross. Doing so would not only make Jesus guilty of idolatry, but would thwart the redemptive plans of God who sent Jesus to seek and save the lost. But because of Jesus' love for His Father and His gracious desire to fulfill His redemptive plans, Jesus would not take the easy road the devil offered.

Again, Kent Hughes applicational insights are helpful: "The siren song of popular culture is to avoid pain and take the easy way, the path of least resistance. But God's Word still speaks truly: "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus embraced the cross by refusing the easy way, and as his followers, he says, we must do the same: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24, 25). If we embrace the logic of Jesus' refusal to take the easy way, we will see that taking the path of least resistance, to follow comfortable expediency, is idolatry—it is worshiping a false God."

Let me add also that Jesus didn't just begin to worship God at that moment when Satan sought to tempt him. He had known a perpetual love relationship with His Father in eternity past, and also in His humanity as He continued to make cultivating intimacy with His Father His greatest priority.

Nothing was worth more to Jesus than enjoying fellowship in the presence of His Father. Treasuring His Father's love is what gave Him the power to resist the enemy. Notice that after giving his record of the temptations of the devil, Luke adds: "*And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.*" Luke 3:13

In other words, the temptations didn't permanently end. The devil kept looking for opportunities to tempt Jesus to act outside of His Father's will. But Jesus never gave in. What's more, He never allowed

anything, including the good work of ministry, to distract Him from setting aside time to be alone with His Father where He savored His identity as the Son of God.

Likewise, as adopted sons and daughters of God, we must make pursuing intimacy with God our highest priority. If we don't, we will be easy targets for the enemy to not only cause us to doubt our identity, but to find it in all the wrong places. To keep this from happening, we must learn to guard our identity.

## **Conclusion**

If you've trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, Satan can't actually steal your identity as an adopted son or daughter of God. O but he is working to keep you from living in the inheritance that is yours in Christ as a child of God.

To overcome His schemes, you must **set yourself apart in the wilderness**, in silence and solitude, away from all the noise so that you can **set your mind on the word of God**, and **set your heart to worship God**.

When you do, you will find that your identity in Christ is the highest of all riches that no person or anything else can take away and that you will enjoy for all eternity to the glory of Christ.