

“Who Are You?” – Luke 3:23-38 – February 3, 2019

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For the past few years I have had an online subscription to Ancestry.com. I really enjoy learning about my ancestors – who they were, where they lived, when they emigrated to the U.S. from Europe, what were their occupations, where are they buried. More exciting is when I find a photograph or a story about one of them. I have been amazed at the amount of information I have discovered about my roots.

One particular great-grandmother has been quite the enigma. Her name was Rose Kiefer, and she born in the Dakotas, and that’s all I knew. I could find no other information about her beyond that. Yet just last week new information about great-grandma Rose came to light. I finally found her parents, who were from Dodge County, Wisconsin. Her father, Nicholas Kiefer, born in Prussia. Her mother, Mary Schaefer, born to German parents in Wisconsin. I immediately sent a text to Susan – maybe we’re long-lost cousins!

As challenging as ancestry is to research now, imagine how difficult it was back in the first century and the preceding centuries. It seems fairly impossible. Yet as we continue our journey through Luke’s gospel, today we read, at the close of chapter three, a rather lengthy genealogy of Jesus. There are quite a few names in this list. And a list like this is easy to skip over.

Yet when we take a moment to ponder this long list of names, we might wonder, why did Luke choose to include this genealogy in his gospel? Breaking up the action with a list of hard to pronounce names. We might be tempted to skip over it, but Luke included it in his gospel for a reason, so it must be important.

You may know that Matthew also includes a genealogy in his gospel. You might be surprised that there are some significant differences between the genealogies in Matthew and in Luke, but that’s not really a problem. The two genealogies serve different functions in each gospel. The gospel writers are not so concerned about the genetic accuracy as they the theological implications.

Luke’s genealogy serves a couple of functions. Whereas Matthew starts his list with the names of the great Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in Luke’s list the patriarchs are buried deep in the middle. It’s not that the patriarchs of Israel are not important, but rather Luke wants to emphasize and reinforce the idea that Jesus came into the **world** as the Messiah, not just for Israel. Jesus was to be the savior for all people, all nations. Earlier in this chapter, John the Baptist warned the people that they couldn’t lay claim to their ancestry to Abraham in order to exempt them from the call to repentance. Being part of the nation of Israel wasn’t some kind of cosmic “get out of jail free” card. **All** people were in need of a savior, and Jesus would be that savior.

Not only does Luke trace the lineage of Jesus prior to the patriarchs, and thus prior to the covenant with Abraham, but Luke goes all the way back throughout all the generations to the original human created by God – Adam. Luke ends the genealogy “son of Adam, son of God.”

In the created world Adam, or adam (in Hebrew literally “earth creature”), is the first son of God. Adam was unique in all of God’s acts of creation. Unlike all the other living creatures, adam was created in the image of God; the pinnacle of Creation. Where God pronounced each act of creation in Genesis as “good,” the final act, the creation of humanity, was pronounced “very good.” Very good indeed. But things quickly changed, as the story of the Fall of humanity illustrates.

Genesis recounts the stories of humanity’s disobedience, illustrating the ways in which humanity fell away from God. The book of Genesis explains how a great rift formed between God and humans, as humans put their own wants and desires before God, and their relationship was distorted. From that time on, from that very first acts of disobedience, God has sought to restore the relationship. To bring about redemption for humankind. That was the goal. That was the promise.

As Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus, Adam is listed last – Adam has no earthly father – formed from the dust of the earth, he is the Son of God. But he is the fallen son. The disobedient son. Choosing to turn away from God to go his own way. Jesus is the New Son. The obedient Son.

Throughout these first chapters of this gospel, Luke has sought to show us the identity of Jesus. From the words spoken to Mary by the Angel Gabriel, “He will be called the Son of the Most High” all the way through to the voice that spoke at his baptism, Jesus has been identified as the Son of God. And just as Jesus was adopted by the man Joseph, husband of Mary, into his ancestral line, Luke shows that the role of Jesus is to provide the means for all humanity to be adopted into God’s new, redeemed family.

This ancestral list of names here in Luke is not important, per se, in its historical accuracy or inaccuracy. The individuals listed are not important, in and of themselves. The list **does** show that Jesus was truly a son of the covenant and that he was in the line of King David – and those ties were important in his role as Messiah for the Jewish people. But it also goes to show that scope of his work, his ministry, would envelope all humankind. God’s purpose of redemption, according to Luke, was to extend the covenant, to broaden the promise of restoration for all people. Yes, Jesus is the son of David; he is the son of Abraham; but ultimately, he is the son of God.

So what does all this have to say to us? How does this speak to our own situation? I started out this message by my curiosity in learning about my own ancestry. Many people are

intrigued by this excursion into our past histories. And I wonder, what motivates us to out seek out, to learn more about “our people” – our tribe? We hope to find a few shining stars here and there – but will probably also discover a scoundrel or two. But these people, long since passed, help us to discover who we are. Or they seem to.

So often we are identified by externals. The color of our skin. Our gender. The texture and color of our hair. The age we appear to be. Our ability or disability to see, or hear, or walk. The genetic traits our bodies exhibit come from our biological ancestors. Things over which we have no control. The family we were born into – consider how different your life might be if you had been born at a different time or in a different place. An immense part of our identities as human beings is left to chance. But once we’re here, once we’re born, our identities grow and change.

Our identities are shaped by other externals - how we are raised, what we are exposed to, what we accomplish, who we marry and befriend, the groups we join, the line of work we pursue, where we live, who we vote for, where we volunteer. So many outside influences make a claim on our identity. Each defining influence pulls us in a particular direction – some parallel, some opposing. We want to make sense of this world and our place in it, and our various identities help us to do just that.

But whoever we are, however we make our way, whatever outside influences guide us – in all these things – we find solidarity with our ultimate grandfather, the disobedient son, Great-grandpa Adam. The story of the fall of Adam and Eve shows how easy it is to pull away from our God-given identity – being created in God’s image. We forget who we are and who we were created to be.

At the moment of our baptism – whether we were just a tiny baby in our parents’ arms, or a child or an adult making an affirmation of faith for the first time – in that moment, we are claimed by God and identified as God’s beloved child. This is a great mystery of our faith, this adoption into God’s family. But it is our most significant identifier. We are not just Republicans or Democrats, Packer fans and Brewer fans, lawyers or educators or homemakers, married, widowed or divorced, male or female, with ancestors from Europe, Asia, or Africa – all these things help to make us unique and interesting. But ultimately, they can’t define us, because those definitions fall short of what we were created to be.

As we seek to make sense of our identity, as we try figure out just who we are – in the end, we have to move beyond the genealogy. We move beyond Adam, to the new Son of God. In Christ we find an adopted brother who walks alongside us, guiding us on our paths. In Christ we can claim our identity as children of God.