

Big idea: What I love about Jesus is that he is faithful – which means that he truly human, which means he can do what was promised about him.

FCF:

Application:

PRAY...

1. Can Jesus... is Jesus?

'Catch me if you can' is a movie about the life of Frank Abagnale. Abagnale was one of the greatest fraudsters of American history. Played by Leonardo DiCaprio in the movie, he succeeds in impersonating a PanAm pilot, an attorney and a doctor. He succeeds in embezzling millions of dollars. And he is eventually caught. He succeeds in his frauds because he can persuade people he is something he is not. It is always the case with fraud – people want to know if you really are who you say you are – can you be trusted? Fraud is about duping people into thinking you are something you are not. Ultimately, people's expectations are crushed, and trust is lost.

The claims made for Jesus, before his birth, were significant. He was described by the angel Gabriel in this way:

You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His

kingdom will have no end... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

Luke 1:31-35

The claims for Jesus are significant, and they turn on a crucial truth: his identity. He is clearly identified as the 'Son of God' – this identity is crucial to the claims made about him. If this identity is false, or exposed, then all the claims about Jesus fall.

It is not an insignificant issue. After all, the first 'Son of God', the first human who bore God's image – Adam – fell. The next human described in 'Son of God' terms – David – well, he fell, too. Even the nation of God's people, described in 'child' imagery, and given the job of representing God to the world – they failed.

At the heart of these three failures was a lack of faith. Put simply, Adam, David, even God's people, did not take God at his word, and live like it. They doubted God's ability to be, and to do, as he said – and so they took matters into their own hands. Put simply, they sinned – they said, 'I am God and God is not', because they did not trust him. They were unfaithful!

In fact, that is the situation for all of those who bear the image of God – all human beings. All human beings prove unfaithful to the image they bear, the image of God, because they doubt whether God can do, and be, as he says.

Can Jesus be any different? Is Jesus any different?

2. A 'positive' identification

Let me be very clear: the claim is certainly made for Jesus – even by Jesus – that he is God's Son:

- In Luke 2:49, he himself identifies that God is his Father.
- In Luke 3:21-22, at his baptism, God identifies him as his Son. In a significant moment, using the words of Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42, God claims Jesus as his own boy. Using Psalm 2, this affirms what was predicted of Jesus: that, as God's Son, he would rule the world; that, as God's Son, he would fulfil God's intention for all humans – to rule the world under God's Word. Using Isaiah 42, this affirms that Jesus is the one who serves God in complete dependence upon God, strengthened by God alone.
- In Luke 3:23-38, the genealogical records identify Jesus as God's Son.

And it is this last identification that is important as we seek to understand the substance of Jesus' identity. You see, as the Son of God, Jesus is also identified as the Son of Adam. In fact, the two are inseparably linked: to be the true Son of God means that you are truly human, and to be truly human – human as God created – is to be identified as the Son of God.

Here is the key, then, for understanding whether Jesus can do, and be, everything promised of him: can he be human in a way that no other human has ever been – can he prove faithful in trusting God? In this, he will be proven, or discredited, as God's Son.

3. The testing moment...

As has been the case throughout his life recorded, God remains the chief actor in the life of Jesus – **look at verses 1-2... READ.**

God himself led Jesus into the desert – the wilderness – to be tempted by the devil. It places a very interesting perspective on temptation, give the truth that God tests rather than tempts. In fact, it is the same word translated two different ways. The temptation of Jesus by the devil, at God's hand, is the testing of Jesus by his Father – the proving in Jesus that he is the Son of God, fully human in a way that no other human has ever been: completely faithful!

After his forty days without food, the devil arrives to tempt Jesus. The connections back to the three 'Sons of God' mentioned before cannot be missed. Like Israel, Jesus is tempted during a period of 40. Like David, Jesus is tested as to his dependence upon God as promise-keeper. Like Adam, Jesus is tested face-to-face by the devil.

Each temptation is a study in itself. But we must notice that the devil, in each temptation, is attempting to expose and undo the identity of Jesus, and so his capability to do his job. The first and the third are explicitly introduced as attacks on Jesus' identity as the Son of God; the second is an attack couched in the promise that is made to the Son of God in Psalm 2: that God will make him the ruler of the world. Here, before Jesus even begins his public ministry, the devil wants to bring him unstuck – to expose him as a fraud, to display that Jesus is like every other human: unfaithful

and sinful, a man who takes matters into his own hands rather than trust God. In essence, here we get to see whether Jesus is like every other person in the world – and every other son of Adam in his family tree!

The first temptation focusses on whether Jesus trusts God's word – **look at Luke 4:3... READ.**

After all, God has clearly stated that Jesus is his 'beloved Son', in whom he 'delights'. What doting father allows his Son to starve? Jesus must take matters into his own hands, because obviously God's word cannot be trusted, and neither can God!

The second temptation focusses on whether Jesus can trust God's promise – **look at Luke 4:5-6... READ.**

Will God really give him all the nations of the world to rule, as he promised in Psalm 2? I mean, the devil gives him the opportunity to grab it all with both hands now – why wait? 'Take matters into your own hands', the devil seems to be saying, 'And all you have to do is have me as your boss'.

The third temptation focusses on God's provision, and whether Jesus will be provided for – **look at Luke 4:9-10... READ.**

After all, it is worth testing a father's devotion to his Son, especially when he expects so much of his Son. Jesus just has to take matters into his own hands, and see whether his Father really does love him.

Each temptation focusses on encouraging Jesus to take matters into his own hands. That is the essence of sin – taking matters into your own hands (REPEAT). It is to doubt God's ability to do and be as he has said. It is to not trust that God can do as he promised. It is to think, and act, as if you can do a better job of God than God.

The temptations that Jesus faces – doubting the word, the promise and the provision of God – are temptations common to all humans. Just look through the family tree. Adam had the same three temptations from the devil in the Garden – and he fell. Abraham had the same three temptations in his life – and he fell. David had the same three temptations in his life – and he fell. Even the nation of Israel – led into the wilderness by God and who wandered for forty years – had the same three temptations – and they fell. Will this man – Jesus the Son of God – be any different?

It is THE fundamental question at the start of Jesus' public ministry, and it strikes at the heart of both his identity and his work.

On the one hand, these are the same temptations we all face. But, on the other hand, these are not the same temptations because here, with Jesus, the stakes are much higher, the consequences global and eternal, and the relationship threatened is at the very heart of the plans and identity of God. Will Jesus stand firm?

His responses are all from the Bible. He quotes from Deuteronomy 8 and 6 to respond to the devil. The quotes are taken from a crucial part of Moses' speech to God's people as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. Here Moses exhorts them to trust God, and to have no other God but him. **Listen to Deuteronomy 6:4-6... READ.**

God's people are to have no other God but him. God's people are to love him with every fibre of their being. God's people must trust God, knowing that his word, his promise and his provision are firm. Each response to the devil is taken from around that statement of what it means to be a person of God, to be someone who represents God to the world.

The first quote acknowledges that God does provide for his people in the wilderness, but that the essence of life is not bread but the word of God that brings life into existence.

The second quote acknowledges that God deserves undivided loyalty because his promises are always true.

The third quote acknowledges that God does provide what his people need – his love never needs testing. And he is not stingy.

Jesus does something that no other human being has ever done – he resists the devil completely, by faithfully trusting God to do, and be, as he states. His identity remains firm and unquestioned – he is the Son of God. His obedience and devotion to God remains established on God's trustworthiness. The devil is resisted, for the

first time in Jesus' family tree. **Matthew 4:10 captures the significance of the moment... READ.**

The identity of Jesus is tested by the temptation of the devil to sin. The identity of Jesus is affirmed by his resistance to sin – not because he was more special than us, but because he was obedient where all others have been disobedient, faithful where every other humans has been faithless.

In this, Jesus displays his true humanity – he is faithful to God above all things. He trusts God to do, and be, as he promises. He represents God truthfully to the world. Jesus is exactly like us in every way but this: he proves faithful (REPEAT).

4. Yes... Jesus is, and can...

Jesus is no fraud – he is who he, and others, say he is. He is the Son of God.

Jesus' identity is proven as he resists the temptation of the devil to express it by being unfaithful to God. Jesus' identity is proven as he proves faithful to God.

What I love about Jesus is that he is faithful – his identity is not a fraud, and the hopes of restoration that we heard about last week remain true, not some false dream. Listen again to the reading we had before from **Hebrews 2:14-18...** and the one we had four weeks ago from **Hebrews 4:14-16... READ...**

What I love about Jesus is that he is everything I am, and everything I should be but cannot be: he is THE human who is

faithful in trusting God; he is THE Son of God, the perfect image-bearer of God.

This is such a wonderful truth, not because it displays what I can strive to be – NO – rather, it displays the one I need, the one who is like me but resisted sin, resisted doubting God's promises, resisted the temptation of the devil, and stood firm as the image-bearer of God. What I love about Jesus is that he faithful, and this is who I need to deal with my sin, to open access to God, whose image I bear, for me. And we will see in two weeks' time why that is so crucial.

That being said, we must not miss this truth, too – as Jesus resist temptation, like every human should, he displays how this is possible. It is not because he has any super-power, or unfair advantage – that would mean he is NOT like me. Rather, Jesus displays what it means to take God at his word and live like it – Jesus displays what it means to be faithful. At the heart of this is God's word which rules all things, from basic human desires like hunger and lust for power and influence, to how to understand life in all its facets and how to speak to temptation.

What I love about Jesus being faithful is that he displays how to stand firm against the devil, against taking matters into our own hands, against sin.

So, here is my challenge this week:

- First, do you know, and love, this in Jesus?

Place: NAC

Date: 17/1/2021

Passage: WILAJI... he is faithful Luke 4:1-13

- Second, how might you share this truth about Jesus this week – he is not a fraud, his identity is sure, and at the heart of that is his being faithful?
- Third, how might you apply his example of resisting the temptation of sin, by holding onto God's word?