

Who I am Makes a Difference

Intro

I want to open this message for this morning with a short chronicle....

A middle aged man was going through some difficult and testing times. After many moments of wondering how he had gotten to this point in his life and questioning almost everything about himself he gave up. Crying out in the most helpless and pitiful moment of frustration he got down on his knees and closed his eyes. This was not a new position, nor was it a new cry. Just a new low, with a new sense of failure...an emptiness that no earthly adventure could fill. Instead of speaking his prayer, he thought he would just let God read his mind...after all, God knows everything.

He held his head and squeezed the tears with his tightly closed eyes. His mind found himself in a very familiar place, surrounded by familiar people, but something was different. The chair where he usually sat, was filled by a man that was happy and peaceful...actually smiling, a natural smile as if it was being powered from deep within. There was no controlling tone, critical conversation, anger or condemnation. The overwhelming worries of life no longer seemed to pull on this man's face. The kitchen was a bustle of laughter and joy. The tears and tension, so often unspoken but heard loud and clear, were as vacant as the darkness on a sunny morning. The little ones were running around as if no one had ever told them that they had to grow up or act their age. They were free and overflowing with laughter and love...trusting with a trust that had yet to be broken.

Opening his eyes the man stood up and looked around. Why was the home he had tried so hard to build not turning out like the one he just saw? Was it really possible to have a home like that? Was it too late? What would he have to give up to be the leader of a family like that?

This man in this story is doing just fine. The home that he intended to build, is being built, but in a much different and better way than he could have imagined. There were and still are a lot of questions without answers, but one of the most important questions this man ever asked himself, was very short and simple.

WHO AM I?

The message today is about our identity and how important it is to know who we are.

So we ask "Is who we are really important?"

Yes it is. God created us all different. Believers and non all want to be recognized for who they are...right from childhood up we are taught our identity...the first thing we learned to say is usually MOMMY or DADDY...that's a pretty good feeling to hear those words isn't it? The first writing in school was our name. That might have been the first time we saw on paper who we are! As we get a little older we start to model who we are based on different ideas...The world of marketing and materialism starts to push us this way or that. We may start to identify who we are based on our friends...family...what we wear, what we look like, what we eat, who we hang out with, how fast our car is, how much money we make....when we look around at our world you can't tell me that people don't care about who they are or at least who others think they are.....Who we are is important to most all of us. It's our nature.

What things in your life do you base your Identity on?

If the most influential and important person in the whole universe stopped you on the street and asked you to describe who you are in one or two sentences what would you say to them? I can speculate what some of us might say, but I will use myself as the example...

Some people answer as the **JOB Guy**...My name is Mark and I work for EnCana... I just put in another 300 hour month...6th one in a row. Hey you have a great day I have to get going, I have to work a little overtime tonight.... Maybe someday we'll meet for coffee.

Maybe some reply as the **Boss Guy**...WHAT? You don't know who I am? My name is Mark and I am the boss here...in fact everywhere I go I'm the boss... I tell people when and how high to jump....just do what I say and you'll be OK.

Possibly we might play the role of "**I have it all**" man. An answer to this important man's question might sound like this. My name is Mark and I don't need anything. You might just as well keep on walking sir because you have nothing to offer me. I have it all. I'm happy with all my stuff and when I'm not ...I just buy more. Plus there stranger....MasterCard interest rates are really low.

Admitting it can be hard at first but sometimes we identify as the **Failure** person? My name is Mark and I just can't do anything right...nothing works out...my mom said this about me...my dad did that to me... the past is never gone because if it was gone I may not know who I was....

Or maybe you are the "**whatever someone else says I am**" person? My name is Mark and I'll be whoever you want me to be...in fact I'm not sure I'm even Mark...just tell me who I am and who I can be for you... lost my Identity person...

I would like you to ask yourselves the question WHO AM I?...and see what kind of thoughts or ideas come to your mind. As you ponder your response to this I would like to focus on three questions that we must consider in order to find out who each of us really is, and what we may have in common when it comes to our identity.

1. Are you a sinner or a saint that sometimes sins?
2. Is your identity rooted in what other people say about you or what God says about you?
3. Does your behavior determine what you believe or does what you believe determine your behavior?

Just so you know, my answers did not come all at once. In fact most of them came in the small still moments just like the one I described, when I was praying on my knees, wondering why my home looked and sounded the way it did. It is possible to have the home I described and it's not too late for any of us. We may have to give up a few things but in the end we may see that what we give up may never have been meant for us to keep...our old identity.

Which leads us right into today's text...

Turn with me to Galatians chapter two vs 15 to 21. Before we read this it would be of benefit to describe who it was being written too.

Paul established churches in Galatia or Antioch. Peter is there ministering and eating with the gentiles, as you remember it was Peter who had the vision from the Lord that confirmed the gentiles salvation through Jesus, now as Peter is eating with these gentiles a group of Jewish leaders roll into town and Peter starts to hang out with them. He actually pulled back and put as much distance between himself and the Gentiles as he could. When Paul shows up he's a bit upset with Peter. Why? In short Peter knew that the Jews and the Gentiles alike were all saved by the grace of God through Jesus but now Peter is starting to forget or back away from his true identity and fall back under the law. Let's read how Paul reminds them and encourages them in their true identity under grace.

Justified - "To be justified means to be declared righteous and accepted before God"

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

17 But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Remember the three questions we need to consider when we decide who we are?

Question one...Are you a sinner or a saint that sometimes sins? When we look at verse 15 we see that we as believers are "Justified through faith in Jesus Christ". Back to the definition of justified meaning we are made right before him and accepted by him. Do we still sin sometimes? Yes we do but that sin is covered by his shed blood. If you are saved then you are a saint.

Question two....Is your identity rooted in what other people say about you or what God says about you? We see in verses nineteen and twenty that "we now live to or alive to God because Jesus Christ lives in us". Here we stand on earth created equal before god. You and I are created equal. Why would we

want to take direction on “who we are” from someone who is only equal to us when we have the option of a direct line right to the creator. I would think we need to rely heavily on what God says about who we are.

Question three...Does your behavior determine what you believe or does what you believe determine your behavior? Verse twenty states that “the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” When we become justified and saved by grace we know that the old nature dies and the new nature takes over. The new nature is to live by faith, because God loves me and gave himself for me. The old nature is to live for yourself and if you do that it soon becomes evident in your behavior or more accurately...your poor behavior.....What we believe does determine our behavior.

How does who you are impact others...your family....your neighbours...the lost?

I remember as a young man watching a movie and remembering one particular scene where all the bad guys are busting out of jail or prison. As they have all the doors open they are looking back calling to this old man sitting in bewilderment. It appeared to me that he did not want to leave...almost fearful of what lie on the outside.....so used to being in that prison.

When we give our lives to the Lord and start to truly obey him we can't help but look back and realize that we are to leave no person behind. This is how we should see our neighbors and the friends at work and the ones we care about that don't know what freedom through Jesus is about.

Who we are in Jesus has the ability to change our world one heart at a time.

What is your answer?

Some of you here today are in a really good place. You know in your heart and mind that you are sons and daughters of promise...you are truly free. But maybe you are one of those people that are struggling a bit. Maybe you walked in here today questioning who you are and find yourself identifying, maybe more with the old sinful nature, than with the new creation. If you want to be free from those chains then today is the day...the time is now. God's provided you a way out and all you need to do is follow. Maybe today could be the first day of your life that you really know in your heart, and in your mind, and deep in your soul, who you were created to be. We are either crucified dead to our old sinful nature and raised again with Jesus as a new creation alive and free for eternity....or we are not. There is no half way on this. Everything in our life should come second to that decision.

Prayer

