

WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST

1 Peter 2:1-10

I want to speak this morning on a subject that is vitally important to us as followers of Jesus. It is a word we hear a lot around here because of the ministry our children & youth pastor has birthed. That term is **identity**; A simple definition would be: **Identity**: the fact of being who or what a person or thing is; the characteristics determining this; the distinguishing character or personality of an individual

This brings us to the title of this mornings message is “Who We are in Christ.”

I. SHAPING OUR IDENTITY

First it is vitally important to understand that no one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do to yourself. Whether we realize it or not, we are in an unending conversation with ourselves, and the things that we say about ourselves are formative, directly influencing the way we live. We are constantly talking to ourselves about our spiritual condition, our emotions, our health, our personality and our relationships...etc.

In so doing we are preaching one gospel or another. It is either the anti-gospel of our own righteousness, independence and wisdom, or it is the true gospel that acknowledges our deep spiritual need of the all-sufficient grace of Jesus Christ. We are either preaching the anti-gospel of loneliness, inability and worthlessness or we are preaching the true gospel of the presence, provision and power of the living Christ. There is incredible power in our words, spoken and not.

Right in the middle of this on going internal conversation, is what we continually speak to ourselves about our identity. As human beings, we are always assigning to ourselves some kind of identity and there are only two places to look. We will either find our identity vertically, from who we are in Christ, or we are shopping for it horizontally in the situations, experiences and relationships of our daily lives.

When we keep our hearts focused vertically upon the face of Jesus, we discover who we were truly created to be as we feed our souls on the reality of God’s presence and the promises and provisions of His grace.

Searching for identity horizontally in personal achievement, the affirmation of men, and conforming to the pop culture of our day we will leave us empty and wanting, and never satisfied. They will never be the messiah they promised us they would be. When we humble ourselves in full surrender before the cross of Jesus Christ, His blood cleanses us, His love assigns worth to our lives and His grace secures our future.

As we come to this surrender, it is not only our mind that needs to be renewed, but our hearts must be reclaimed by the powerful, redeeming grace of Christ. This reclamation of our hearts is both an event (justification) and a process (sanctification).

Our salvation and growth to maturity as Christians is never just about what you know (information). It is always about how grace employs what you know and transforms the way you live. Knowledge is an accurate understanding of truth. Wisdom is understanding and living in the light of how that truth applies to the situations and relationships in our daily lives. Knowledge exercises you brain, wisdom is the commitment of our hearts that leads to the transformation of our lives into the image of Christ.

I am convinced that the biggest crisis in the church of Jesus Christ is not that we are easily dissatisfied but that we are to easily satisfied. We have a twisted ability to make things work that are really not working. We learn to adjust things that we should alter and to be okay with things that should be confronted. We learn how to avoid what should be confronted and become comfortable with things that should be brought to accountability. So we settle for second best when our God through the grace of Jesus Christ has offered us infinitely more.

Our identity, who we are in Christ is not shaped by what we know alone. It is always shaped by the true condition of our hearts. The problems we face in life are almost always a result of being out of vertical alignment with Jesus. We quickly blame the circumstances, situations and people, (horizontal relationships), but the real problem is our relationship with God.

When we attempt to find our identity in what we do, what we possess or have achieved, we will always be frustrated and disappointed. It is only as we face our brokenness and sinfulness that we will begin to allow the power of grace to bring the acceptance, forgiveness and healing we desperately need. Identification with Christ alone frees us to become who He created and called us to be. That is the true Christian life and it is one of wholeness, peace and freedom.

Living successfully as a believer, fully identified with Jesus Christ has very little to do with our life skills, knowledge or experience. It has everything to do with our vertical alignment, the condition of our hearts and the direction of our gaze.

Here are some examples from the Word of God of those who found their identity in a vertical relationship with God and refused to be influenced by the horizontal relationships of the world.

II. EXAMPLES OF RIGHT VERTICAL ALIGNMENT

A. The Faith of Abraham

Abraham was chosen by God to receive the covenant promise and told that his descendants would be more in number than the sands of the sea and stars in the heavens. He was old when he received the promise and according to his wife, ancient before the promise was fulfilled.

But there was something unique about Abraham unlike us, the longer he waited as the promise was delayed, the stronger his faith became. Why? Because Abraham purposed in his heart to believe God, he choose to meditate upon power and character of the God who made the promise instead of the impossibility of his own situation. Rather than a cycle of discouragement and hopelessness Abraham is an example of someone who believed God and identified with what

God had said about him and it came to pass. God called him the father of many nations and his descendants are living in the earth today.

Romans 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

B. The Commitment of Joseph

He had been chosen by God and given a dream that he would be the deliverer of God’s chosen people from famine and extinction. But first he was despised and sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He was bought by Potiphar, and the favor of God was manifest upon his life so that he became the ruler over all the affairs in the house of his master.

When seduced by Potiphar’s wife he refused her advances, not because of his skill or great will power, but because of a deep heart devotion to his God.

Genesis 39:7–9 And it came to pass after these things that his master’s wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.”⁸ But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand.⁹ There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

His heart and life were not ruled by the desire for horizontal pleasures but by a vertical alignment and commitment to the honor and glory of God. It was a glory far greater than the temporal glimmer of this present world that had captured his heart.

C. The Courage of David

Judges 17

This is a well-remembered account from scripture as the armies of Israel in the valley of Elah faced the Philistines and their champion Goliath. But there was a great problem. The army was well prepared for battle but suffering from a terrible case of “identity amnesia.” They had forgotten who they were. They had forgotten the promises of God and their identity as His chosen people. As a result they drew a false spiritual equation as they evaluated the moment. They hid in fear.

When they looked horizontally all they could see was the size of the threatening giant and they lost sight of the majesty and power of the Almighty God.

Enter the shepherd boy. David arrives to bring provisions to his brothers he becomes that focus of their anger and rebuke rising out of their fear. Still in the midst of their rebuke he couldn’t understand why they army was not fighting against this blaspheming giant. David runs to the fight not away from it because he has drawn the right spiritual equation. He rightly aligns himself in vertical worship and identifies himself with the promise and provisions of God. As he does, he sees God as omnipotent and Goliath as a defeated foe.

1 Samuel 17:45–47 Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. ⁴⁷ Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands.”

David knows that he doesn’t fight under the shadow of Goliath but in the brightness and glory of the Almighty God. It was the confidence of faith residing in his heart that propelled him forward with courage into the valley to slay the giant.

D. Peter the Water Walker

Probably the best example of what I am trying to communicate today is Peter.

Matthew 14:22–33 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. ²³ And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. ²⁴ But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. ²⁵ Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” ²⁸ And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” ²⁹ So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” ³¹ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.”

As long as Peter kept his eyes fixed on Jesus there was no storm that could sink him. It is no different for us today. As we find ourselves loving Christ, worshipping Christ and obeying Christ we are safe from every storm life may send our way. That doesn’t mean they will not come. It does mean they won’t have the power to sink us if we stay rightly aligned to Jesus. But we have to get out of the boat.

In each of these examples it was the commitment of the individual’s heart and the focus of their gaze that made the difference. Their hearts were fixed and they were steadfast in their faith. They were identified with God in vertical relationship and the horizontal circumstance had no bearing on their faith.

III. WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST

Our identity is not found in what we do, how much we own, or what our last name is. It is not found in our education, our net worth or our status in the community. We are the children of God, bought with the blood of Christ and held securely in the hand of our Father.

Our identity is found in the fact that we have been redeemed of God, sanctified and set apart by His choosing and ordained for good works. But let me remind you of this: What we worship is what rules our hearts and what rules our hearts will determine the course of our lives.

A. As we wind down this morning I want to look back to our text from Peter and highlight just a few aspects of our identity and who we are in Christ as His followers.

1 Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9–10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

1. Living Stones

Our God no longer dwells in temples made with hands but in the hearts and lives of men. Buildings do not house the presence, people do. We are the living materials with which our God is fashioning the heavenly city He will abide in forever.

2. A Chosen Generation

This refers to the Lord's choosing of the people of Israel but also to those Gentiles grafted into Christ through faith. The main thought with regard to our identity is this fact, He chose us. It was God's loving initiative bringing man back to Himself. When we didn't know we were lost and weren't even looking for Him, He was looking for us. Salvation is God reaching and man responding.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

3. A Royal Priesthood

A royal household, a family of priests. Both titles stress the dignity of who we are as the church because of our union with Christ. Jesus is King, and all in his "house" belong to a royal house. Calling the church "a body of priests" emphasizes its corporate role in worship, intercession, and ministry.¹

¹ Edwin A. Blum, "1 Peter," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews through Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 231.

In the Old Testament period, God's people *had* a priesthood; but today, God's people *are* a priesthood. Each individual believer has the privilege of coming into the presence of God. We do not come to God through any person on earth, but only through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the great high priest before the throne of God and because He is alive in glory, interceding for us, we can minister as holy priests,² transact the business of the kingdom here on the earth in in this generation.

4. A Holy Nation

Holy nation” shows that God has “set apart” the church for his use. It is important that we, as God's priests, maintain our separated position in this world. We must not be isolated, because the world needs our influence and witness; but we must not permit the world to infect us or change us. Separation is not isolation; it is contact without contamination.³

5. His Special People

1 Peter 2:9b–10 ...His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

We are His own special people. We once where not a people but now we have obtained mercy. We have been chosen, we have been ordained to minister His life and we have been set apart to worship Him, and to carry the anthem of His praise into all the earth.

We are a chosen generation. Chose to show forth His praises to the lost and the dying of this world. As we identify with the crucified one we can begin to live in the power of His resurrection and grace.

If we will refocus are hearts vertically upon the crucified one, and make Him the object of our worship and love, then the horizontal noise that rises from the stormy waves of this life will no longer distract us and we will see His glory and presence manifest.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 401.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 402.