

Who am I? A Sermon Series on our Identity

1. Introduction with Skit (“I’ve been robbed of my identity!”)

- a. I don’t know if you have ever had your identity stolen by an identity thief, but it can be a very difficult experience.
 - i. I spoke with someone several years ago (before the identity theft thing became well known) whose entire life was ruined because someone impersonated her and took out credit in her name. It was almost impossible to convince the creditors that it wasn’t her who had incurred the debts! They had even caught the culprit who tried to convince the police that she was the real person and that the victim was in fact the criminal! After large legal bills, ruined credit and hundreds of letters later, this woman and her husband finally got the attention of their state representative who helped sponsor a bill to make it easier for victims of identity theft in Ohio to regain their good name.
- b. You might not be aware of it, but every human being upon the earth has had their identity stolen. Yes, stolen, taken, robbed, and every one of us has settled for a much inferior identity.

2. Our Original Identity

- a. Let’s look at the book of Genesis 1:26-28 *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*
 - i. Do you see the identity you and I were given? We were made in the “image” of God.
 1. We were created to be the reflection of His glory.
 2. We were as like Him as we could be and still be created beings.
 3. (We do not look like God physically, but in character and spirit).
 4. Our role associated with that identity was god-like as well...to have absolute dominion over the earth. God created us to be “like Himself.”
 - ii. Think about what an image of something is. It is duplicative in nature. Statues are made in the image of a person. If you see yourself in the mirror, you say you see “your image.” On the term “image,”
 1. The Broadman Bible Commentary states: *“It describes an exact resemblance, like a son who is the very image of his father.”*
 2. The word “Likeness” does not convey such preciseness as “image.”
 - a. To be like someone means you possess many, but not all of the characteristics of that person.
 - b. Obviously, man does not possess God’s omnipotence, wisdom, righteousness, perfection, ability to create, and divineness.
 3. Yet, man was created to be “like God” to such a degree that creation itself would stand in awe of mankind and say, “wow, that’s what God is like.”

3. The problem is, that mankind doesn’t really look like that now, right?

- a. This is because Satan, in the form of a serpent came along. We know from the bible that he had been “cast down to the earth” after his rebellion in heaven. Adam and Eve had dominion over him as well, because they had dominion over all the earth and everything that was in it.
- b. Satan wants that dominion, he is also very jealous of mankind, because they have what he could never have. As the most beautiful angel, he thought of himself as god, his pride seduced him to believing he could usurp the throne of heaven itself.

- c. Satan decides to rob Adam and Eve (and consequently, every one of their descendents) of their identity, because as free creatures, they have unhindered access to God that he does not. In fact, they are so much like God that he himself is jealous. So what does he say to them?
 - i. Genesis 3:1-5 *Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' " "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*
 - ii. Here is the irony and the tragedy of it all. Adam and Eve were already like God in every way possible. **Satan was tempting them to obtain what they already had.** (With the exception of the knowledge of good and evil = sin).
 - 1. (Sin you say, God doesn't know sin! But you forget that Jesus Christ was slain before the foundation of the world, "he who knew no sin became sin, so that we could become the righteousness of God.")
 - iii. This is absolute tragedy. To try to gain what you already possess. And to pay a price that forfeits what is rightfully yours to lose what you sought to gain.
 - iv. The net effect of the fall of man was that the image of God was marred in mankind. We lost the glory we were created to have, and we lost the fellowship God created us for!

4. **The inferior identity** that we obtained as a result of the fall:

- a. Genesis 6:5 *"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."*
- b. The identity that mankind gained through his rebellion in the garden was that of a "sinner."
 - i. Alienated from God, cursed in all he did (cf. Gn 3), evil in his heart.
 - ii. And up to this day, mankind doesn't resemble the Father in whose image they have been created, but rather, the father of their rebellion (John 8:44 *"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies"*)
- c. **One of the most significant and lasting consequences of the fall was that our identity became entwined in what we did and what we do.**
 - i. We sinned, therefore we became sinners.
 - 1. Romans 3:23 *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*
 - 2. Romans 7:14-20 *"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."*
 - a. In other words, I am a sinner because I sin and cannot stop.
 - ii. This "become what you do" infects every aspect of our life.
 - 1. From being a "sinner" to being a carpenter, a mechanic, a soldier, etc. We have learned to define ourselves by our actions, by what we do.
 - a. If we fail, we are a failure. If we succeed, we are successful. How fleeting these definitions of who we are, are!
 - 2. Instead of defining ourselves from God's point of view, we define ourselves from man's point of view.

3. I experienced this first hand. In high school, I discovered that I gained notoriety from excellence and attention from the teachers. So I quickly equated success with “doing well.” By college, I discovered I was a mediocre student, so I got a job and poured my life into that. In other words, I tried to reinforce my identity as a successful person by finding things I excelled in and avoiding those things in which I would struggle. In sports, I did the same thing. I had an aptitude for volleyball but Golf didn’t come naturally. Guess which one I spent my time and energy in? Of course, the one that I could excel at. And I didn’t drop performance based living when I became a Christian. I often felt like a failure when I would fall into an area of sin, and beat myself up, calling myself all sorts of names (you loser, you are such a weakling, you can’t say no to temptation, you are a failure, you are a lousy Christian, etc). It wasn’t until I read “Search for Significance” that I began to see that wasn’t the right way to live or treat myself.
4. **God sees what we are and what we can become.** God defines us by who He has made us to be...but we defy that definition, because it takes faith to implement. We end up defining ourselves by what we see. But God doesn’t work that way, He sees our potential!
5. Man sees only what we have done, and very rarely forgets it, but most often throws it in our faces!
6. **Do you see the problem with defining ourselves by what we do? It constantly changes!** One day I don’t sin, so I define myself as righteous. The next day I screw up, so I define myself as a screw up. The next day I succeed in something...do you get the point?

5. Our New Identity

- a. Jesus understood how we were made, and so when He was talking to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, he was explaining the process through which our identity gets changed.
- b. John 3:10-18 *¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. " ⁴"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." ⁹"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹²I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. ¹⁴Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."*
- c. Jesus was telling Nicodemus that we are dead spiritually, we are born sinners, with a fallen and broken identity. We cannot enter the Kingdom of God that way. Something must change. Something supernatural must occur first. He called it “being born again.”

- i. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, receive the free gift of his love and forgiveness, and surrender our lives to Him, God exacts a transformation inside our spirit. His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, comes in and joins with our spirit and makes us a brand new creation.
 - ii. In fact, our spirit, once 'DEAD TOWARD GOD' becomes alive with the Spirit of God. It literally becomes PERFECT! (It must be that way for God to dwell in our spirit).
 1. We have the very Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead living inside of our eternal spirit.
 2. Our spirit becomes perfect. And we are born again. Spiritually.
 3. God makes us brand new.
 4. It is a complete and total change in our person and our identity.
 5. It is not just a "figure of speech," a "metaphor" or "a positional change" but a real, radical transformation.
 6. Our old man has "died" and Christ now lives in us!
 7. 2 Cor 5:17 "
 8. Not only in God's eyes are we perfect, but we literally are perfected in our spirit (our innermost being).
 - iii. The rest of life is allowing that Life INSIDE OF US to work His way through our soul (mind, will, and emotions) and out of our lives into the world in which we live!
6. I have spoken to a number of Christians who when I tell them they are a saint, they deny it. "No, I'm just a sinner."
- a. Think about it...**you become what you believe about yourself.** If you believe yourself to be a loser, guess what, you will be a loser. If you believe yourself unattractive, you will act unattractive. If you believe yourself incapable, you will act like it
 - b. **Your identity will affect how you live.**
 - c. God calls you something and you deny it? . If you believe yourself to be still a sinner (when God calls you a saint) then you will act like a sinner and not a saint!
 - i. Are you going to call God a liar? **Disagreeing with what God says about you isn't a trivial thing.**
 - ii. Think about the implications of that!
7. I like to pray about what God says I am, and declare it openly before heaven and earth.
- a. I am no longer a victim, I am victorious. I am no longer a sinner, but a saint. I am no longer cursed, but I am blessed, blessed in my going in and coming out, blessed in everything I put my hands to do. I am no longer defeated but am more than a conquerer. I possess the mind of Christ, I am the righteousness of God in Christ, I have every heavenly blessing in Christ, I am an ambassador of Christ,
 - b.

- i.
- c. Quotes/notes:
 - i. Man was given intellect, which means he could think and reason. As a rational being, man was unique in creation and clearly distinct from the animals. The image of God in man means he was "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24; cf. Colossians 3:10). Man therefore would have had a natural tendency to do what is right. In his moral perfection, man had free and open communion and fellowship with his Maker. Man walked and talked with God.
 - 1. One: God gave man a mind so that he could know God.
 - 2. Two: God gave man a heart so that he could love God.
 - 3. Three: God gave man a will so that he could obey God.
 - ii. When God created man in His own image, He gave him a distinctive nature and place in creation (Genesis 5:3; 9:6; I Corinthians 15:39; James 3:9). Man "is the image and glory of God" (I Corinthians 11:7), "made a little lower than the angels, and [God] hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalm 8:5; cf. Hebrews 2:9). As sovereign among the creatures, man had dominion over everything on earth (Genesis 1:26, 28). Being in God's image means we can do things God does, such as, talk (2:3; 8:13), rest and sit (2:2; Psalm 47:8), walk (Genesis 2:8), hear and talk (6:12; Exodus 16:12), smell (Genesis 8:21), reason, think, etc., and even have some features as God has, such as, a face and back (Exodus 33:20, 23), a mouth (Isaiah 1:20; Matthew 4:4), hands (Psalm 10:12; Isaiah 41:20), etc. This does not mean God has the same physical features man has, but that man can function, in part, like God does.
 - iii. *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. - (Psalms 8:3-8 NIV)*
 - iv. We have all been made in the image and likeness of God, and because of this, each of us is capable of determining our own destiny. Unlike the plants and animals, God has endowed us with the ability to form a relationship with Him, the ability to increase our knowledge and wisdom, and the responsibility of caring for the world that He has given us.
 - v.