

A Deeper Walk With Jesus

Part 2 – A True Identity

ILLUS – In October 2007, Abraham Abdallah, a 32-year-old former dishwasher, pleaded guilty in a New York court to masterminding the biggest identity theft attempted so far. He was attempting to fraudulently gain over \$US80 million. He had 800 fake credit cards as well as 20,000 credit card blanks in his possession, and had managed to steal the identities of Steven Spielberg and Paul Allen (co-founder of Microsoft). He had also gained the credit records of Warren Buffett, George Lucas and Oprah Winfrey.¹

ILLUS – In the US in 2002, an estimated 700,000 people were victims of identity theft, were stripped of their savings and their credit ratings, thrown into disputes with banks, loan companies, stockbrokers and even governments because their identities had been stolen and put to criminal use.²

A person's identity is a valuable thing.

Sometimes, of course, people willingly sacrifice their identity.

ILLUS – Phillip Tolomeo was a loan collector for a dangerous organised crime gang ... in Chicago from 1978 to 1988. He fell out of favour with the gang boss and fled Chicago with detailed records of the gang's illegal loan-collection activities. He handed those records over to the FBI and was placed in the Witness Security Program.³

ILLUS – Actually, since 1970, more than 7,500 witnesses, and over 9,500 family members have received new identities as part of the Witness Protection Program offered by the US government.⁴

In this message, we are continuing in our theme of A Deeper Walk With Jesus and in particular we're going to explore the subject of A True Identity.

Our self-identity goes right to the heart of who we are.

Here are some questions that people ask that are mostly to do with self-identity.

Who am I? What's so special about me? Why do I even exist? What makes my life worth anything? How can I make my life count? When I leave this planet, will it make any difference at all that I ever lived?

All of these questions go right to the core of who we are, our self-identity.

And because of this, you can bet that our self-identity is an area the devil will mess with big-time.

One of his major strategies is to cause us to draw our identity from wrong sources.

So we're going to look at what those wrong sources are, and what the right sources are.

Things that are important in this world are a bad source of self-identity

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world. (17) And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Do not love the things of this world because they are passing away.

2 Cor 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

There it is again: The things of this world, the things that are visible, are only temporary; but the unseen things of the next world are eternal.

So it's useless getting our sense of identity, our sense of worth, value or importance from the things of this world.

Here are some examples of how we can tend to get their sense of value from the things of this world.

Our wealth

Some people gain a sense of their own value from how much money they have in the bank or how much real estate or other property they own.

When a person does this, they are really putting a dollar value on themselves.

But contrast this with Jesus' outlook on the value of a human soul.

Mat 16:26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

One human soul is worth more than the total value of everything on this planet.

But when a person's self-identity is wrapped up in their wealth, what happens when they lose it?

Stock markets can plummet, banks go bust, people lose their investments.

ILLUS – As a result of the Wall Street Crash of 1929, 1,616 banks went bankrupt, 20,000 companies went bankrupt, and in one year, 23,000 people committed suicide – the highest ever!⁵

If who you are, and your life, are wrapped up in your money and your possessions, if you lose it all, you've got nothing to live for.

Our looks

Some people's lives are totally wrapped up in what they look like.

ILLUS – But imagine a stunningly good-looking model or movie star. Everybody adores them; everybody admires them; everybody wants to be them or be like them. One well-known male model claimed that he was the most beautiful man in the world.

But how many of you can tell me the antidote to vanity?

The antidote is getting older.

Here are some interesting observations about getting older: You know you're getting old when ... You're asleep, but others worry that you're dead. You have a party and the neighbours don't even realise it. Your back goes out more often than you do. Your supply of brain cells is finally down to a manageable size. You sing along with the elevator music. You enjoy hearing about other people's operations. Your ears are hairier than your head. Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.

But seriously, when you get older, you lose muscle mass and bone density, your skin becomes thinner and its pigmentation becomes uneven, your skin loses its elasticity and develops wrinkles, the fat in your cheeks begins to disappear, hair turns grey and becomes thinner or falls out altogether.

Gives you something to look forward to, doesn't it? And that's just some of it.

But what happens if you're a movie star and you're starting to get on a bit, losing your good looks?

Facelifts, rhinoplasty, hair transplants, liposuction, implants, other plastic surgery, Botox, expensive anti-wrinkle lotions.

Anything, just to hold on to what you once had.

But Botox won't work forever: Eventually, the wrinkles are going to come anyway, gravity will work its evil magic on your face.

And if your self-identity is wrapped up in your good looks, when you lose it, you can lapse into a depression that you'll never recover from.

Status

Status is all about whether I'm well-known in the community or in the church.

What sort of title I have in front of my name (Dr, Sir, Rev); whether or not I'm famous.

Achievements

This can cover a lot of areas: How high I've climbed on the corporate tree; how many books I've written; how many public awards I've received; my sporting prowess; the level of my musicianship.

Circumstances

Our health: Some people's lives are totally defined by their sickness.

It dominates their thinking.

Then there's the stigma of divorce, past failures, past successes, our family upbringing and experiences.

Our wealth, our looks, our status, our achievements, our circumstances; these are some of the things the devil wants to use to define us.

But they are all things that belong to this world and this world is passing away.

Even though a lot of these things are not necessarily bad in themselves.

They become a problem when our self-identity, our self-worth, is wrapped up in them.

How can you tell if your self-identity is derived from these sources?

Ask yourself these questions: How much of my thinking or activity is taken up by these? How would it impact my life if I lost one of these?

ILLUS – Imagine the filthy rich guy who loses all his money with no hope of recovery, and is no longer a filthy rich guy. He's just another guy.

If being extremely rich was really important to him, then losing it is something he may not be able to cope with.

The same applies to our looks, or status, or a whole bunch of other things in our lives.

I want to give you some things where God wants us to derive our sense of identity.

If you get your sense of value and worth from these sources, no matter what happens in life, you will never be moved.

1. I am a son of God

This is the starting point.

I am God's son, I belong to His family, and He is my Dad.

Rom 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Eph 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, (5) having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

We are all sons of God – a generic term, covering both genders.

At first blush, you might be tempted to think, "But I'm not a natural son, I'm only an adopted son."

But so many children around the world are natural children, but their parents don't want them.

Kids might be an accident of timing, and even if they are planned, the baby might arrive and the parents say, “Oh, no, it’s a girl. We wanted a boy.”

But when the parents adopt, they get the child they want, especially if that parent is God.

So I’m not just any old son.

I am adopted into God’s family.

Just think of this: God looked down from heaven, and out of all the people He saw, He chose you to be part of His family. He said, “That’s the one I want. Yes, you. I choose you.”

You have been hand-picked to be in God’s family.

If that doesn’t make you stand tall, I don’t know what will.

2. God’s love for me is immense

Jer 31:3 The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.”

He loves us with an everlasting love, and the result of that everlasting love is that out of His lovingkindness He draws us to Himself.

Paul took up this theme in the New Testament, beginning in Eph 2:4... “But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...”

How do we know God loves us?

I can think of three good reasons.

First, look around you; just take a good look at God’s marvellous creation.

Isn’t that the action of a loving God?

Second, God takes an ongoing and active interest in us.

Theologians put that in a category they call the Doctrine of the Immanence of God.

No matter how big, no matter how small, God is vitally interested.

But to me, the most important evidence of the immense love of God for us is found in this verse, “But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...” (Eph 2:4)

God is rich in mercy.

ILLUS – Bill Gates is rich in money. Money just oozes out of him. But God, who owns all of Bill Gates’ money anyway, is rich in mercy. Mercy oozes out of Him.

ILLUS – If I were God, I probably would have looked down out of heaven and said, “That’s it! I’ve had enough of these turkeys. I’m going down there to sort things out.” And I would have come down to this planet, death rays in my fingers: “Hey, you!” “Yeah?” Zap!

But God looked down from heaven, and He looked with eyes of compassion, and He saw a world that was drowning in sin, entangled in its own selfishness, and He said, “I better go down there and sort things out.”

And instead of coming as the all-powerful King and everlasting Judge, He took on the form of an ordinary man. He took up a trade as a carpenter.

He let them rip Him to shreds with a scourge and let them crucify Him.

Why? Because He is rich in mercy.

How is it that He is so rich in mercy? Because of His great love with which He loved us.

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.” (Jer 31:3)

This is where we should draw our sense of who we are from – the immense love that God has for us.

So first, I'm a son of God; second, I am loved by God...

3. I am a representative of Christ

We so often look at this in terms of responsibility: I am Christ's representative, therefore I have a job to do, and I need to be faithful in doing that job.

And that's true, but let's look at it from a slightly different angle.

If I am Christ's representative, what does that say about what God thinks about me?

The key word here is trust.

God has looked at you – and me – and said, “I am going to trust this person with this important task.”

And based on that trust, He makes us His ambassadors.

ILLUS – Just think about this for a moment. You're the owner of a multinational company, and an opportunity comes for you to get into the Chinese market. It's a great opportunity. You need to get over there and talk to them, but for various reasons, you can't. So you choose an ambassador. Here's a multiple choice question: Do you a) go out into the streets and pick up the first person you see, and send them? Or b) look around for a person who will best represent you in the way they dress, the way they look, the way they act, the way they relate to others, the way they deal with people.

Who thinks “a”, the random guy off the street?

Who thinks “b”?

You don't want just any old body. You want someone special as your ambassador.

Here is the Encyclopaedia Britannica definition of ambassador: highest rank of diplomatic representative sent by one national government to another

Now listen to this:

2 Cor 5:20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

Let's say that again using the Britannica definition.

2 Cor 5:20 Now then, we are the highest rank of diplomatic representative sent by King Jesus to earth, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

God has put a lot of trust in us to do the job of being His ambassadors.

Here are two reasons why God has put His trust in us to get the job done.

He has filled us with His Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

By filling us with the Holy Spirit, He has equipped us to be His ambassadors.

Everything we need to be able to share the gospel with people comes when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

2 Cor 3:6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

He has given us the most power-filled message of all

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

The gospel has the power to bring salvation, healing, transformation, the knowledge of God, significance, release.

So here's a little reminder: This is where we should derive our self-identity, our significance, the meaning for our existence and our self-esteem.

1. I am a son of God

2. God's love for me is immense

3. I am a representative of Christ

All of this gives us the ability to walk tall, no matter what anyone else thinks of us.

¹ smh.com.au

² smh.com.au

³ From howstuffworks

⁴ United States Marshals Service website

⁵ www.historylearningsite.co.uk