

Identity and Self-worth

Intro

Can you imagine what your life would be like if you woke up tomorrow morning and had amnesia- that is, you could not remember anything from your past. You look into the faces of your loved ones and didn't know who they are. You wouldn't even know who you are.

You would immediately probably feel confused and possibly even afraid. Why? Because you don't have a context for understanding who you are. You would have an identity crisis.

Why is it so important for us to be able to answer, "Who am I?" Because the answer determines how you see yourself and affects every area of your life.

I. Identity Lost

From the very beginning God created man as an image bearer of God and defined our identity for us.

Genesis 1:26-27 says, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them."

God created us to reflect his goodness and glory in the world around us.

Satan understood the significance of our identity and so he tempted Adam and Eve to sin by questioning their identity. Satan lied to Adam and Eve and implied that their eyes were closed to their true identity. In Genesis 3:5 Satan said, "For God knows that when you eat of it (the forbidden fruit) your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Satan is questioning their identity. He says that they need to eat of the forbidden fruit and then they will know who they are. He says that then they will be like God. Adam and Eve have forgotten that God already created them in His image.

And so they disobeyed and mankind has been struggling with an identity crisis ever since, seeking to construct an identity apart from God. Seeking some way to feel good about themselves again.

I. What are typical ways that people in our culture try to feel good about themselves?

A. They look to their education and intellect.

1. "I got good grades in school, therefore I measure up."
2. "I can look down on you because I am smarter than you."
3. "I have this diploma from this prestigious institution, therefore I must be a somebody."
4. So people look to their superior intellect and think they are better than you and therefore can feel good about themselves.

But what about jocks who aren't that smart but are amazing athletes? What do they do?

B. They look to their athletic abilities.

1. After all, good athletes get the applause of the people in the stands,

right?

2. So they think that if they are stronger, or faster, or can out shoot you that then they are a somebody?

What else do people look to in our culture to try to feel good about themselves?

C. People look to their possessions.

1. If they dress nicer or have nicer or more expensive stuff than you that makes them feel like they are better than you.
2. If they have the latest electronic gadget, or newer car, or money to buy whatever they want, then they are more important than you.

D. Would you agree that these are some of the things that people in our culture look to to try to feel good about themselves, to try to prove that they are a somebody, that they matter?

E. But what's the matter with trying to find our worth in our intellect, or athletic ability, or our possessions?

1. It is all uncertain. It can all be taken away. What happens when you take a test and you fail? What happens if you get injured and can't play your sport anymore? What happens if your money is lost? What happens when someone comes along and is smarter, faster, richer than you?

2. Think about it, even when we do get the applause of people and get what we want, it is never enough. We always seek after more.

3. We live with the constant pressure of having to do more and after we get validation from our performance we have to perform again.

We live in constant fear of losing and what happens if we fail and then we won't measure up?

F. Whenever we seek acceptance and approval apart from God our identities will be messed up. The Bible actually calls this idolatry. Whenever we desire something more than God, whenever we look to something else other than God to define us, we will experience pain and suffering. It may even be good things that we are looking to, but if we are looking to them instead of God we are sinning.

II. How Identities Are Formed (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

READ JEREMIAH 9:23

"This is what the Lord says:

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom
Or the strong man boast of his strength
Or the rich man boast of his riches."

A. Notice what the Lord tells them **not** to do.

There are certain things they are not to "Boast" (NIV), "Glory In" (KJV). The word "boast" literally means "praise". The idea of this is, we are not to try to get

praise, applause, or approval from our wisdom, strength, or riches.

This person is saying, "I am praise worthy and valuable because I have" (Intelligence, athletic ability, money, good looks, etc.)

B. The reality is that we all need/want praise

We all love it when we perform and the audience gives us a standing ovation.

In our inner being, we all need an inner applause. We all want to know we are accepted and valued. That is the way we were wired from birth.

III. How do we get a correct identity? How should we find our worth?

Read Jeremiah 9:24

A. Notice it doesn't say that we shouldn't boast. It says that we should boast.

B. But what should we boast in?

Jeremiah says that we should boast in knowing God.

C. Jeremiah says God can give you confidence and it's not tied to your performance at all.

D. Jesus says this very same thing to the disciples in Luke 10:17-20.

What is Jesus saying? He is saying that doing ministry is a good thing. But He says, don't find your significance and joy in what you do but in the fact that you belong to God- that you have a relationship with God. It's not about what you do but who you are.

E. So how do you get this identity?

1. This is more than just knowing **about** God, but having a relationship **with** God.

2. He says it is not just knowing God generally, but that he knows God's kindness, justice, and righteousness.

3. If we are trying to get our identity in our performance, then the justice of God and His righteous standard will terrify us. Who can live up to His holy standard?

4. Notice God makes the first attribute we need to know- His kindness. This is not a general kindness, but it is a covenantal love, unfailing love, unconditional, committed love.

5. God is saying, "Do you want confidence and acclaim and approval? I can give it to you absolutely apart from your performance. Even though you can't live up to my righteousness and my justice.

6. How can this be, an acceptance and approval of God apart from our performance?

a. Gal. 6:14 "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" What is Paul saying?

b. What happened at the end of Jesus' life?

This somebody (Christ) became a nobody. The one person who absolutely deserved applause was mocked, jeered, and rejected even by God.

That is why Christ cried out on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" What does all this mean?

c. It tells us that Jesus, on the cross, got the verdict our sin

deserved and when we embrace Christ by faith, we get the commendation that Christ deserved. We get to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

d. Jesus got the verdict we deserved and we get the applause that His performance deserved. How? Because of the cross. That is why Paul tells us to "Boast in the cross".

e. What does the cross tell us?

It tells us that God loves us, for He did not withhold even His Son for us (Rom. 8:32). The irony is that the more we boast in Christ, the more we realize how much He loves us. And the more we become convinced of the approval of God, we won't care what others say or think.

f. If others snub you, it won't destroy you. Why? Because your approval doesn't come from them. This gives you true freedom.

g. If you aren't confident in who you are in Christ, if you don't know that in Christ you are praise-worthy and love-worthy, when criticism comes, you will respond in one of two ways:

-you will hate the person for what they said, if you have high

self-esteem.

-you will be devastated, if you have low self-esteem.

h. But what if, you have such certainty that you're beyond self-esteem, one way or the other? You can listen to criticism and not be devastated.

You will have the freedom to enter into relationships not to get, but to give.

Conclusion

So where does your identity come from? Where does your self-worth come from?

-does it come from what others say about you?

-Does it come from your abilities or performance?

Both of these will ultimately fail you.

God's Word is saying our identities/ our worth shouldn't come from these things, but because we are in Christ as a result of the cross. Christ's perfect performance has been attributed to us; therefore, when God sees us, we can experience the approval and applause of the one who matters most - God Himself.

We are only able to experience this if we have a relationship with God and believe that God's opinion of us is the opinion that matters most.

How can this be? Because in Christ, you are fully loved by God, just as you are.

Do you know that you are a Child of God? If not, why not make the decision today to repent of your sin and place your faith in Christ's death on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins.

For believers here today, for those who are in Christ, do you have this confidence or are you striving to find your identity apart from Christ. Why not today repent of your self-justification and today determine to rest in what God says is true of you because of the cross.

Pray

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

- 1) Do you struggle with trying to feel accepted and valued?
- 2) What are things you typically do to try to feel good about yourself?
- 3) Why do these things ultimately fail to give us the approval that we truly want?
- 4) How does having a relationship with God give us the identity we desire, apart from our performance?