



IDENTITY – GOSPEL IDENTITY

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Introduction

We are on our journey in our new series Church Alive. **We're trusting that each one of us will be awakened in our God-given gifts and callings in a fresh way and begin to serve one another and make a difference in our city.**

Our first stop on this journey is to examine the topic of Identity. Today we will look at having a gospel identity.

Gospel Identity

This question of identity, self-awareness – who am I – is a great question and a foundational question, especially as we face upheaval in the world around us and a global disruption.

Word from God: The story of sleeping beauty. The Princess fell under a spell and fell asleep - the whole castle fell asleep. One day a brave knight broke through and saw her – she was beautiful but asleep; he looked at her and fell in love. When he kissed her she awoke and the whole castle and village awoke. This is a picture of the church. He loves His **bride and she's beautiful but sleeping. He's going to kiss her and awaken her. I feel that's what He's doing. He's wanting to be intimate with us.** When the church awakes, the city awakes and others awake.

This is a very important time. People are going through an identity crisis, asking who am I and what gifts do I have?

Looking at who I am starts with Jesus. Looking at who He is and what He has done for us.

First let's put it in context – how does the world – particularly the individualistic Western world and the African world answer the question of identity – who am I?

In the past I found out who I was through my parents and my community. Today, God and traditional values and fathers are not in the picture. People are saying I am going to decide who I am based on what I feel and what I choose and what makes me happy; I am not even going to allow my own body to decide what my gender is; that there is no God or truth out there that I can trust. Maybe I will find something inside myself that I can trust? The current generation is facing difficulties like no other before.

Look at where the headlights are pointing. We need to lower our headlights to look at the younger generation; they need our help like never before! Identity is a critical subject.

2 Timothy 3:1-2 ESV But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self...

Our Government is swallowed up by selfishness. We need to help one another. The world is in a mess. Sexuality and gender is in a mess. This generation is struggling with the shame of what I'm becoming and the guilt of what I've done because there is no external right and wrong anymore.

- You can't find your identity by looking inside yourself

We're a fallen creation, broken, even though there may be good things in our lives.

Jeremiah 17:9 ESV The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Isaiah 53:6 ESV All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way...

So - How can you find true identity by looking inside yourself?

There is Good news:

- Jesus offers you a new identity through the gospel – through his death and resurrection.

You don't have to look within yourself – it's exhausting. You look away from yourself – it's counter-cultural - and look to Jesus.

God made you when we are born – and remade you and gave you a new identity as a free gift through faith in Christ. A gospel identity is better than any personal or family or clan or tribal or cultural or racial or national identity. **It's an identity that is not oppressive but brings true freedom** – it removes burdens of sin and broken self-image – it helps you discover the person that God made you to be and brings you greatest happiness and glorifies God!

The **Gospel is a happiness movement. It's not based on how you feel inside, or based on your choices.** It's based on who God says you are. He placed you in Christ as a Christian – it's me in Christ and Christ in me.

The book of Hebrews is about the unfinished work of Jesus as **He's gathering a multitude** of believers for glory; also the unfinished work in the believer.

Hebrews 2:16-18 ESV ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 4:14-16 ESV ¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What did Jesus do?

1. Jesus had to be made like us in every way so He could identify with us and we could identify with Him.

He's here to help us. He was like us in every way, yet without sin. God with skin on – with a body, emotions, suffering etc. We learn theology on the streets. He took on flesh so we could be changed. He left glory, emptied himself by adding humanity, which limited Him.

Jesus was God in the flesh, fully God and fully man. He took on the inner nature and attitude of **a servant. He didn't hold onto an exalted identity.** Born into poor Jewish family in a despised town among a despised people. He crossed Sea of Galilee on borrowed boat, rode on a borrowed donkey and when he died, was laid in a borrowed tomb – to identify with the poorest of the poor.

When He did miracles, people looked at Him and said this is God at work. He also fell asleep on a boat, was thirsty, etc. There was no beauty or majesty to attract people to Him. Religious **people couldn't recognise who He was**; even His **own family didn't recognise** him at first. **He wasn't "glowing"**. He was a friend of sinners and lived among ordinary people. He treated women well. He was "touched with the feeling" of our weaknesses. Every one of us has weaknesses – self-image, gender, finances, sexuality, educational, no father, no strength at home, etc. Jesus knows the worst thing about you and He still loves you.

One of greatest requirement for a high priest was sympathy – because people are full of weaknesses. He is merciful – **doesn't give us what we really deserve. He deals with us in grace and mercy**, which reveals His greatness. He died for our sins - the things we do wrong, but he also carried our brokenness to the cross. He carried our brokenness, our sorrows. He identified with us. He carries you – your sins and weaknesses.

2. Jesus was also faithful to God – achieving propitiation for our sins.

He didn't just identify with us on earth, but justified us before God. He purchased a new identity for us in His blood. Propitiation – a sacrifice that turns away anger. God was angry with sin and what it has done in our world and lives. The sacrifice of Jesus means that the wrath of God, the full anger of God Almighty fell on His Son. It was the will of the Lord to crush Him, so that our sin was dealt with fully on the cross. Jesus replaced us; now we have peace with God because of what Jesus had done.

He was beaten to a pulp before his crucifixion – when they look at Him they were appalled and asked, "is that human?" He suffered the ultimate public shame – on the cross. To the Jews it meant being cursed by God. Pilate had him beaten so badly he was hoping they'd let him off.

God was satisfied with the death of Jesus. Our salvation is grounded beyond ourselves - on what God did Himself. God the Son offered himself to God the Father through God the Spirit. We just need to believe it and receive it.

Feelings and choices:

Jesus put His personal feelings aside to save us – his soul was in anguish. In the garden He prayed three times, and asked if there was any other way. He knows what it feels like to struggle, to agonise internally and be overcome with grief and the physical affliction, of coming face to face with the reality of being a sin bearer.

Then when He hung on the cross and darkness descended, a sign of judgment, He said, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" He experienced being cut off from God – experienced hell on our behalf.

He made choices – He willingly gave up his life to give us new life.

His willingness tackles the very heart of what sin is. We sin because we want to. Because what you want is more powerful than what you believe. Preaching needs to tackle the loves of our heart, so that we love Jesus the most. Jesus willingly gave Himself. He allowed himself to be handed over for our transgressions.

Jesus' life:

First half – He's demonstrating the kingdom. He was in control.

Second half – He enters his passion as he surrenders his soul to the Father’s will. He loved me and gave himself for me. He was not in control. He allowed things to be done to Him. How did he do it? He held onto His identity as a Son. He went back to his relationship to his Father

An awareness of your identity – sonship – is what carries you through trouble and suffering. Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered, although He was a Son. You’re a son, a daughter of God. You belong to Jesus. Go back to your identity. Affirm your identity again. Nothing can take that away.

Romans 8:31-39 ESV

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?³⁶ **As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”**

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is the gospel that gives you true identity, an identity that is bought with blood. A new identity that we know we’re loved, forgiven, right with God; a reconciled identity. You can trust Him.

Application:

1. Settle who you are in Christ. Thank you Lord, I receive it, instantly.
Stage 1 faith: Trust God and believe the gospel. Receive cleansing, healing and a new Identity. Keep drawing near to the throne of grace. Receive mercy for the past and grace for future exploits.
2. Then go out and serve God.
Stage 2 faith: There is unfinished work to do in the city, in your family. Go into the heart of the city, hold onto your identity and share what God has done for you. Stay close to Jesus and the people of God. Go out and let your light shine - be salt and light. We are the unshakable people of God. You have peace with God now – assurance of salvation.

Go out and serve the purposes of God in your generation!
