

Who We Are Part 1

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[0 : 00] Good evening, let's start with prayer. Our Father and our Lord, we do indeed thank you for the privilege of being able to meet together and look at your word. Father, we pray that each of us might be sensitive to what it is that you are teaching us tonight.

Father, we pray that you might give us calm minds and open hearts, in Jesus' name, amen. I'm sorry for the coughs.

I apologise up front. It is wonderful to be here and it is even more wonderful to start this new series on identity, as Janet has spoken about.

And you might wonder why would we choose a topic like identity? Well, at the very heart of who we are is what influences all of our decisions.

It influences the choices we make. It will influence all of our reactions, whether they are reactions to things that happen out there to other people or the things that happen to ourselves.

[1 : 13] We, at our very core, that influences all of those things. And depending on how we see ourselves, depends on whether our inner being is in turmoil or whether it's frustrated or whether it is at peace with whatever is happening in our world.

And it's how we see ourselves that we need to look at very closely because I actually think that it helps us live the life that the Lord actually has called us to live, if we're very honest with ourselves. We already know that if we are one of God's children, then we are to be a light in our community. We're to be a light in our families.

And we're expected to respond differently to whatever happens in life and the things that are thrown at us. We're expected to live differently because we are Christian.

Scripture tells us that we will go through many trials to enter the kingdom of heaven. And so how we go through those trials and not to be personally shattered along the way is what we want to actually look at.

[2 : 35] In Corinthians, Paul actually is encouraging all the new believers. And he's saying to the new believers about the way that they perceive themselves but also other people.

He says to them, from now on, we regard no one from a worldly view. Now, wouldn't that be fantastic if that was us?

But we do regard others. We do regard people from a worldly view, don't we? We tend to identify ourselves and others by our appearance, by our performance, and our social status.

And the Bible is very clear, however, that that's not who we are. It says that we're made in the image of God. And being made in the image of God, we have a spiritual nature and we have a human nature, a human body of flesh.

But it's not our outer person, this bit. It's not this that is made in the image of God. It's our inner person that is created in the image of God.

[3 : 45] It's our inner person that has the capacity to think, to feel, to choose. Deep down inside of us, we are spiritual beings.

1 Corinthians 4.18 says, For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. So when we look at Adam and Eve before the fall, we know that originally their lives were very different.

They were alive both physically and spiritually. Being physically alive means that Adam's physical body was connected to his inner being, to the core of his being.

And we too are physically alive. We can taste, touch, smell, feel and see. But Adam was also spiritually alive. That is, the core of his being was connected to God.

And that is how we were designed to be as well. On the one hand, our spirit connected to our physical bodies. And on the other hand, our spirit connected to God.

[5 : 03] But a change came, which we'll talk about in a moment with Adam and Eve. First of all, we need to understand that this connection to God gave Adam a whole different quality of life from mere physical existence.

Being spiritually alive meant that Adam's identity had three very important qualities. That is, he had significance, he had security, and he had acceptance.

Let's look at significance. God gave Adam a purpose for being. He was to rule over the birds of the sky, the beasts of the field and the fish of the sea, scripture tells us.

Adam did not need to search for significance because he already had it. He also had security. He was totally safe and secure in God's presence.

Everything he needed was provided. Food, shelter, companionship, everything. He had no concept of what it meant to need anything at all.

[6 : 22] And he had acceptance. Adam had an intimate relationship with God. He could talk with God at any time.

He knew that he had God's full attention. Then God created Eve for Adam and he had a sense of belonging, not just to God, but to another person.

And they together were accepted by God and they were accepted by each other. They were naked and unashamed, nothing to hide, nothing to cover up.

They had an intimate relationship with each other in the presence of God. Now that's how God created you and me to be. We were designed for that kind of life.

Complete security, a real purpose, no need to worry about anything, and a sense of belonging to God and to other people. So what happened?

[7 : 29] Sorry. If having significance, security and acceptance made up Adam's identity, then what happened to us?

Well, we need to look at the temptation and the fall to understand why the world has a messed up identity. In Genesis 2, 8, 9, we read, Now the Lord had planted a garden in the east in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed.

And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

And a bit further down, it says, The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. And the Lord commanded the man, You are free to eat of any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

For when you eat of it, you will surely die. Now the tree in the centre of the garden reminds us that moral boundaries are given to us for our good.

[8 : 53] They are part of the way that the world is, part of the divine pattern of the garden. And when we overstep the divinely given boundaries and seek to trespass into areas which belong to God alone, the word comes to us, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.

We notice also that this one negative command is set in the context of divine care and provision from God. It is not a harsh restriction, but rather it's a symbol of the fact that crossing the God-given limits diminishes rather than enhances our human well-being.

It gives a boundary within which there is freedom. And unfortunately, the idyllic setting in the Garden of Eden was shattered because that boundary was crossed.

Now, we all know that children respond best when they know their boundaries in a home, where there is freedom to explore, to learn, and yet be safe from harm.

A confidence grows in each child when they know that the adults are caring and loving them by protecting them from harm.

[10 : 27] That's what God was doing in the garden. In Genesis 3, we had it read, it tells a sad story of Adam and Eve's lost relationship with God.

The effects of the fall were dramatic. They were immediate and they were far-reaching, infecting every subsequent member of the human race, you and me.

What happened? Well, it's simple in some respects. They ate and they died. Their union with God was severed and they were separated from God.

Did they die physically? Not immediately, although physical death would be a consequence of the fall as well, but they died spiritually.

They were separated from God's presence. They were physically cast out of the garden. Just as we have inherited physical life from our first parents, so we have inherited spiritual death from them as well.

[11 : 41] Consequently, every human being who comes into the world born physically alive but spiritually dead. We are all separated from God in our birth.

Romans 5.12 says, Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned.

This is why we as a church spend a lot of time praying for those people who are in the dark and who do not yet know Jesus. We want the Lord to bring them alive, to waken them up and bring them spiritually alive because they cannot do it by themselves.

Only God can do that. Now, how did this temptation come to Eve? Or how does temptation come to any of us for that matter? The serpent began the conversation in the seemingly harmless terms of a discussion about God.

The serpent doesn't deny the goodness of God. He simply sows very small seeds of mistrust. He isn't looking like something evil that Eve would be frightened of.

[13 : 07] After all, she is in the garden with all the creation that has all the animals that are there. It might have surprised her that the serpent spoke, but she clearly wasn't shocked to see a serpent in the garden.

It simply moves from the woman's knowledge of God's goodness to cause doubt about the one prohibition that God has given the answer to the woman's freedom.

It does so by twisting ever so slightly the word from God that was to give freedom to make it sound as if God was being mean.

Did God say, you must not eat of any tree of the garden? If God is really as generous as we have come to believe, if God really cares for our welfare, surely he would not deny us this one small thing which looks good for food and pleasing to the eye. God knows that we need food. God wants us to delight in his world. Surely he would not forbid this one little thing. Friends, once we open ourselves up to a discussion with the tempter as to what God really meant, we have placed ourselves in a situation where escape is very difficult. And just as an aside, why do you think the Lord's prayer says, lead us not into temptation as opposed to lead us out of temptation once we are there? Once we are near temptation, it is very difficult to make rational decisions.

Temptation begins with the small things. How can one small piece of fruit bring so much damage to the whole world? God was calling Eve to trust him and we too are asked daily to trust this same God, to know that he is for us and he is not against us. Adam and Eve, whilst in the garden, could only make one wrong decision, only one, and they did. So we need to see what some of the effects of that one wrong decision leads to. There are two main things. One has a number of subheadings, but one is the loss of the knowledge of God and the other is many negative emotions.

[16 : 16] But first let us look at the loss of knowledge of God. The wisdom of God was no longer with them and they were left to discover their own identity, purpose and meaning in life independently of their creator. The sheer fact that Adam tried to hide from God shows us his deficiency in his understanding of who God was. Listen to how Paul describes Adam's descendants in Ephesians. He says, they are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of their ignorance. Paul also tells us that the natural person who is spiritually dead cannot discern the things of God because they must be discerned spiritually. To be in a relationship with God was to know God. When Adam and Eve sinned and were banished from God's presence, they lost the intimate knowledge of God they once enjoyed. That's how we came into the world, without a true knowledge of God. And so we question God if things are not going according to the plan that we have. Along with having a loss of knowledge of God, there came a host of negative emotions.

Where they have had enjoyed freedom and security, there is now fear and anxiety. The very two things, that break intimacy in relationships, fear and anxiety. Look with me at the verses in verse 8. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord as he was walking in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, where are you? He answered, I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid.

And so he said, who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I had told you not to eat from? As if God didn't know already.

The first emotion is fear. Do you know that phrase? Do you know that that phrase, do not fear, is the most repeated commandment in the Bible? The most repeated.

[18 : 50] Anxiety disorders are the number one health risk of our world. It is hard to imagine, but Adam and Eve had no irrational fears until they sinned. Not one.

And we too were born with a driving need to get back to the position of security that they had lost. So that was fear and anxiety.

They also felt guilty and shameful. Originally, they had a sense of significance. When the relationship with God was broken, that was replaced with a sense of guilt and shame.

All of us would hate it if everything about ourselves, the good and the bad was on open display for everyone here at church to see.

All of our selfish thoughts, all of our selfish desires. We would have a sense of guilt and shame and be very frightened that somebody might see the true person that Debbie Gould is.

[20 : 03] Identity crisis and negative self-image have been human problems since the fall. So what do we do?

What's the normal thing when we know that we've done something wrong? What happened with Adam and Eve? We automatically go to blaming somebody else or something else.

Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent, and we are guilty of blaming also. They also felt rejected.

They were banished from the garden. They lost the relationship with God. Originally, they had a sense of belonging, of complete acceptance.

When the relationship with God was broken, there came a crushing sense of rejection. Everyone is born with it. And it creates in us a very strong need to be accepted.

[21 : 07] We have a strong sense of wanting to belong, to fit in, to be accepted. And you see this very clearly when individuals, young people, desperately want to be married, thinking that having a spouse is going to give them that sense of belonging that we all crave for.

My whole personal testimony is about wanting to be accepted and looking for it in all the wrong places. They also felt weak and powerless.

Originally, Adam and Eve had the power of God within them to be and to do all that God created them to be and to do. Now they had to rely upon their own strength and their own resources.

And hence, we too grew up trying to control our own destinies, which often results in us trying to control others.

We take on a self-reliant attitude and choose to be independent to others and to God. I'll do it my way, as the famous song goes, or I did it my way.

[22 : 29] Or we try to prove ourselves by what we achieve in life. What uni we go to, what marks we get, the promotions we might get from work.

And dare I say, sometimes it actually goes into even what ministries I might have in a church. All of this we use to try and feed our insecurities.

And if we don't achieve and cannot control, we then feel as if we have failed and that we are failures. We can all make the mistake of believing that the role we play, the job we do, the results we get in exams, that it's these things and many, many more.

It's these things that define who we are. We all have been there. We have all made that mistake. We can think that we do not believe any of what the world says about who we are and how we should think.

But our decisions and our choices and our reactions often will tell us something different. Let me repeat that.

[23 : 48] We can say that we believe what the Bible says, that I am free in Christ and that is a truth. But in reality, how we make choices, what we react to, what decisions we make, that is what tells us ever so clearly what is going on inside of you.

Another emotion is that they felt depressed and angry. And we see this in the children of Adam and Eve, when they brought an offering to the Lord and Cain's offering was rejected by God.

He felt depressed and angry and we know from Scripture it then led into murder and murdering his brother. We all in varying degrees get depressed when things are not going as we would like them to go.

Is my identity tied up with my life going smoothly? By that I mean when life is tough and seems to be breaking at the seams, do I question my worth?

Do I believe the lie that I am only whole as a person when all is going well and everyone loves me?
[25 : 19] So there is something wrong with me if all is not going well and people are not loving me.
Do I feel a failure?

Do I feel as if I have no worth if that is happening around me? Do I feel as if I have no worth if I have no worth if I have no worth if I have no worth?

That Adam and Eve lost. But we don't know how to do it. So it's no surprise that we can be confused as to who we really are and what will make us happy.

Now the world thinks that they've got the answer to this whole identity thing. The world will actually tell you that if you have performance plus accomplishments, then that will equal significance.

The world will tell you that if you have status plus recognition, then you will have security. The world will tell you if you have appearance plus admiration, then you will have acceptance.

[26 : 39] But human effort cannot recapture what Adam and Eve lost. The only possible answer to our predicament is to restore our relationship with God, to reconnect our spirit to God's spirit, to become spiritually alive again.

But that is not something we can do ourselves, and many of you already know that. So God sent Jesus to undo the work of Satan, who had deceived Eve, resulting in the sin that separated her and Adam from God.

Jesus was like Adam in that he was both physically and spiritually alive. But he was unlike Adam because Jesus never sinned.

He modelled for us how a spiritually alive person can live in this fallen world, and it is only by absolutely being dependent upon the heavenly father.

The only way to live. But Jesus came to give us more than an example. He came to give us life.

[27 : 59] John 1 says, In the beginning was the word. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. John 10.10, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

John 11.25, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies. In other words, he will live spiritually even if he dies physically.

What Adam lost was life. What Jesus came to give us all was life. Whenever we become Christians, our spirit is reconnected to God's spirit.

We are spiritually born again, and we can know God and relate to others in the same intimate way that Adam and Eve knew.

Friends, if you are a Christian, do not be tempted to think that you cannot fall into the trap of believing what the world believes about who you are.

[29 : 08] I have seen time and time and time again over many years of ministry, many Christians who have fallen for the world's trap of believing that they do not have worth when in fact Jesus came so that they can have freedom in him.

In 1 John 5.12, the apostle says, he who has the son has life. He who does not have the son does not have life.

Our need to establish an identity, to be accepted, to be secure and significant, are fully met in Christ.

We have seen that the world does not have the answers to our identity, but Christ does. Believe the truth that knowing Christ gives you the confidence of being very safe and secure in the Father's arms and his heart.

Amen.