

Our Walk

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Preacher: Jeremy Tam

[0 : 00] All right. Thank you so much for that reading. We've been talking a little bit.

If you were here last, actually, you know what? This cross needs to be closer to the middle. Because even though this banner is just metal and vinyl, there's nothing inherently beautiful about metal and vinyl.

The image on it is the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ. And that is what our focus is in this series. This is what our focus is in worship. And this is going to stand. And again, there's nothing more sort of special about bringing the cross closer to me, but just even communion.

Listening to those lyrics, listening to Arnell and Eric lead us. You know, what heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are still, when striving sees in light of the cross.

[1 : 19] And if there's one thing I hope we get away from, we take away from this morning, is that Jesus Christ is amazing.

And he's everything. And it's so simple, and you will probably have heard the word Jesus Christ, the name of Jesus Christ before, but it's something that we go back to again and again.

So that's even when we did communion, when we prayed for the kids, when we listened to Aniko's testimony, these acts of worship, again and again responding.

The kids that we sent out, an act of worship, saying, kids, this is so important, that we're going to actually dedicate our time, our volunteers, ourselves as parents, both biologically and spiritually, to say, this is so important, you need to hear this, you need to hear the message of Jesus Christ.

So this is what this series, is about right now, in Christ, union with Christ. And last week, if you were here, Chris focused on chapter two of Ephesians, and what it means for our identity to be completely shaped by Jesus Christ.

[2 : 40] And we learned that those, but whose we are, this is what he said, whose we are determines who we are. In other words, if we are children of this perfect heavenly father and king of the universe, whose we are, if we're these children of this heavenly father, then we are actually given this status of royalty.

And that shapes who we are. Just think about a monarchy today. I know maybe a lot of you guys follow the British royal family, right? It's not just the fashion, and the glitz, and the glamour, but just, I guess, the gossip, and the exciting news that comes out of there.

Who follows, who's a fan of Prince Harry here? It's all right, don't be bashful, you can be honest.

What about Prince William? Who's more of a Prince William fan here?

Prince Harry? Prince Harry? Oh! Yep, I think I like William a little more too. Who doesn't really care? There's a few people who aren't being completely honest here.

But here's the thing, here's the thing. Regardless if you're a Harry fan, or a William fan, or a Middleton fan, the truth of the matter is, when they came into this world, when they, you know, when they came into this world, little as babies, they didn't do anything to earn that title of Prince.

[4 : 13] They didn't do anything. They literally just came into existence. They didn't do anything to achieve that, and in the same way, when we are born again into God's family, we have this new identity, and God even calls us a royal priesthood, that we didn't do anything to achieve.

So as we move into today's sermon, we're building on that foundation that Chris laid last week about our identity. In Christ, we have a new identity, and that shapes our entire lives, and our whole lives, and that's what we're going to turn to this morning.

So, if you had met me during my years in university, it's quite a few years ago, even though I might not, you might not be able to tell, and you maybe observed me for a little while, and you had talked to me, you probably would have seen a pretty solid Christian resume, a Christian CV, if you want to put it that way.

I was a leader in my university ministry. I prayed a lot. I read the Bible. That was the time when I read the whole Bible from beginning to end, and it wasn't just a normal Bible. It was a study Bible. So, it had lots of annotations and lots of commentary, and I read all of that, too. So, that was a big deal. I had a regular prayer and devotional times.

[5 : 38] I had gone through a number of discipleship classes. I went on retreats. I shared the gospel with others. I went on a mission trip. Big check there. Went, actually left the confines of my country.

Actually used my passport. Big check. I gave financially. Check. I even wore a WWJD bracelet sometimes. You guys remember those?

If you don't know what that means, it stands, it's an acronym for What Would Jesus Do? And it was quite big sometimes. It might still be big. I don't know. I don't really follow that anymore.

But I even had the fashion to tell me and to tell others of who I was. So, I did all these things pretty well and it felt like I was growing as a Christian.

That I was making progress and I might even venture to say and tell someone or at least think in my own heart, I was a pretty good Christian. And if I had read today's passage that Esther and Vicki so beautifully read, if I had read that today, I would have been pretty confident thinking that I was putting off the old self and putting on the new self every day.

[6 : 53] That was me in university. But, of course, there's a big but here. But one day I got really upset at a friend. And honestly, in hindsight, it was over something that was much more about my personal expectations than anything.

And after I kind of just blew up at them, I was pretty shocked at myself. I realized that that outward expression of my anger was really just, aside from being very uncomfortable and stupid in hindsight, it was really just the tip of the iceberg because inwardly it had become so much easier to be judgmental towards the people around me, especially the Christians.

because I had felt like I had become such a good Christian myself. And sure, I was more self-controlled most of the time in my outward behavior towards others, but inside, just like Ed was saying during communion, it was a cauldron, a pot of mixed motives.

Some godly, some very ungodly, some I didn't even realize. And basically, the question I faced in university in that incident and numerous other little incidents was this.

Jeremy, what's the point of all these things I do as a Christian, things I take pride as evidence, as fruit of my faith, when I can still be such a jerk?

[8 : 30] What's the point? And I had placed so much value in those things I was doing as a Christian that I forgot about being a Christian was first and foremost about my identity, just like we learned last Sunday.

So Paul says in chapter 4, we just read, you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds, darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness in their heart.

And in that context, Gentile simply means anyone who's not following Christ. And back then, back in university, I certainly wouldn't have considered myself one of them. but in hindsight, I could see that even as a professing Christian, how I was walking in futility, in ignorance, in darkness, finding my value and identity in the things I did.

Some of us here may have been Christians for a very long time and we're still struggling with finding our identity in things we do.

I still struggle with that today. I think that's why I can empathize. No matter what your beliefs are this morning, whether you're Christian, non-Christian, agnostic, atheist, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, whatever your worldview is today, I think we all know something just by virtue of living in Hong Kong and living in the world.

[10 : 18] it's this. It's part of the system to measure what we do and to ascribe value to that. And here's what I mean.

Just think about it. You know, you're a kid, you're a young age, you're in school, you're getting marks, you're being assessed, you move up from grade to grade, you know, you go to university, GPA, degrees, clubs that you have to join, high table dinners if you're in Hong Kong U, you have that path for career advancement and job promotion.

And numbers are everywhere. We use them to measure everything from national economic growth to the number of reps you did at the gym yesterday. right? Just like Ed was talking about, the

markets, numbers.

And we live in a culture that is just saturated in this idea of self-improvement. It's the name of the game. You know, browse any major bookstore and you'll see just scores and scores of books, both Christian and non-Christian, that are basically telling you how to be a better person.

You know, our society, our culture, at least a lot of what we hope and aspire to is built on meritocracy, this idea that those who do well, who perform well, should advance.

[11 : 46] It's only fair, right? And then we have to devise these systems that measure what it means to do well. And so all of that is ingrained in us.

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not anti-meritocracy, I'm not anti-statistics, I'm not anti-numbers and metrics. I happen to think numbers are very useful and I use them every day.

And self-improvement is a good thing. And who wouldn't want to improve and get better? But here is the question that I think we're being challenged with and I certainly have been as we look at the passage and we look at the message of Ephesians.

Is that the best way to describe the Christian life? Our walk as Christians? Is progress and growth the best way to describe the Christian life?

And as we look at the remainder of the passage, I think the answer is quite clearly no. So follow with me in chapter 4.

[13 : 02] Paul is contrasting Gentiles with Christians. And this is what he says. That is not the way you learned Christ.

You have heard about Him. You were taught in Him. The truth is in Jesus. That is not the way you learned Christ.

You have heard about Him. You were taught in Him. The truth is in Jesus. And if you've been part of Watermark for a decent amount of time, you realize we talk about Jesus a lot.

He's the reason why we're called Christians. So you've got to figure he's pretty important, right?

And we're going to continue talking about him in the coming months in just different sermon series about how Christ actually shapes different dimensions and aspects of our lives.

And some of us are probably thinking, what? Jesus again? I've heard that before. I've heard that before. It's like, I'm sympathetic.

[14 : 09] It's like you're going to school and year after year you're just learning the same thing over and over again. And then you're like, did I even move up a grade? It's Jesus again?

But Paul makes it so clear in Ephesians. If you remember last week, Chris explained that the first three chapters of Ephesians is basically about our identity in Christ.

And Paul is hammering that home. Remember who you are. Remember who you are, guys.

Remember who you are. And then in the second half, he's moving, he's shifting towards what is the result of that identity, that new identity.

But here in chapter four, at the beginning of the second half, guess what? It's Jesus again. And I'm not making this up. There's something about this guy Jesus, and Paul is saying we have to go back to him again and again, seeking him, seeing him, experiencing how he transforms every aspect of your lives.

And this isn't a school subject, because Jesus is interested in every last detail in your life right now, past, present, and future.

[15 : 26] So the truth is the answer for Christians is always Jesus. And though we joke about that time, especially with the kids, they just know that that's the answer, regardless of the question.

Even though we joke about that, it's actually true. And it's what makes Christianity so utterly unique, among all the major world religions and worldviews, because everyone else points you to a set of teachings that you have to follow and get things right to be good enough for God, right?

But the Christian gospel points you to a person, Jesus, the only person who ever got everything right because he's God.

God. And the gospel says put your faith not in yourself but in him. Hold on to him. Love him.

Be in relationship with him. Like the image that Chris gave us last week, we're all like this prostitute, this sex worker on the street.

[16 : 36] We're starving, ashamed, sick, and broken, and Christ is the perfect king who reaches out and says, I love you. Not because of anything you did.

Not because of anything you didn't do. I love you, I choose you, and you are beautiful in my eyes. And I give you, I bestow upon you a new identity.

This image of the bride and the bridegroom is used over and over again in scripture. scripture. And even though we are so unfaithful to God, he faithfully pursues us like that perfect king.

If you're not sure, if you've never heard about that before, just go, when you go home tonight, read the book of Hosea in the Old Testament, and you'll see what I mean. So when we think about our new identity, our new life that we've been learning about, it's about a relationship, relationship. The Christian life is ultimately about a relationship with God. Not progress, not growth, not self-improvement, not transformation.

[17 : 53] It's ultimately about a relationship. And you may have heard of all that before, but remember that the concept of being in a relationship, a personal relationship with a personal God, that's pretty revolutionary in human history.

And if we forget that, if we take that for granted, we're just going to default back to our drive, that ingrained drive to do and to measure, to do things and to do better.

Think about a loving relationship that you have right now. It might be your relationship with your husband, your wife, a family member, a best friend, a close friend.

Is the ultimate goal of that relationship to be a better person in that relationship? No. Or is the ultimate goal to love and to cherish that person, to get to know that person, to respond to that person?

Husbands, when you propose to your wives, did you say, you know, my love, after this journey, I want to be a better person.

[19 : 13] I just want to improve myself. Will you marry me? No, right? And if you did that and she still said yes, man, she is a keeper.

That'd just be weird, right? Parents, do you say to your children, son, daughter, the real reason I brought you into this life is so that you and your mom could have, I mean, me and my mom, me and your mom, me and your mom.

The reason we brought you into this life, mainly your mom, the reason we brought you into this world is because we want to have better lives. Do you say that to your kids?

If you do, stop doing it. Because that's scarring. It's scarring to have the weight of your generations of expectation on you.

And just remember that God didn't give you children so that you could fulfill your own dreams. So when you truly love someone, loving them is the goal of the relationship.

[20 : 25] And I'm not talking about transactional relationships where you're just in the relationship to get something out of it. I know I do that all the time. I'm sure you can think of examples in your own life. I'm not talking about those types of relationships.

I'm talking about a loving relationship. And yes, your personal growth might become apparent and develop as a byproduct of that loving relationship.

relationship. But if self-improvement is your goal, whether it's subconscious or a stated goal, if that is your goal, you will have no power for any real and lasting change, any real or lasting transformation.

And that's what I realized those years in university. I could do all the amazing Christian activities I wanted, but my heart was still like what the Bible says in Jeremiah 17.

Deceitful. Desperately sick. Beyond understanding. Because doing things in the name of Jesus doesn't make me a Christian.

[21 : 35] Being in a loving relationship with Jesus is what makes me a Christian. You know that prostitute who's been chosen and united with the king?

She doesn't parade around trying to find validation in the things she does. She knows that the status that's been bestowed on her is only because the king chose her to be his queen.

And the king is with her. He's beside her. He's leading her. Did you notice in chapter 4 when Paul says we are to learn Christ?

Christ? To learn Christ? That idea of learning a person is utterly unique. It's truly unique. Nowhere else in the Greek Bible does it say learn a person.

It doesn't even, as far as we know, it isn't even in any Greek writings before the Bible at all to learn a person. But in Ephesians, Paul is saying that Jesus Christ himself is the content of what we learn as Christians.

[22 : 45] We welcome him as a living person. We're taught in him. The truth is in Jesus. And experiencing a relationship with Christ is the ultimate goal of the Christian life.

God pouring out his unconditional love to you and us just responding in love towards him. Our love motivates us to learn Christ, to learn what he loves, what he cares about, to learn what honors and glorifies him, to learn to be like him.

And everything we do as Christians must come out of that relationship. You know, all those spiritual disciplines I was practicing back in university, Bible study, prayer, fasting, whatever it is, they're just ways to get to know Jesus, the person I love.

All those acts of worship and the life I experienced in community, that's just a way to respond to Jesus, the person I love.

Genuine change, genuine growth, genuine progress will only come out of that love. And guys, this is actually really, I think this is really good news when we think about our spiritual walk.

[24 : 12] Because if progress is the ultimate goal, and if we're honest with ourselves, then I think we would fail all the time because we're always going to fall short of perfection in this lifetime.

You know, we might think we've overcome this one kind of nasty plant of selfishness, righteousness and pride and self-righteousness, but like any weed, it just pops up again in another shape, another form, another circumstance.

You know, I like to think of sin in terms of both things we commit, you know, things we do that we shouldn't do, but also things we omit, things that we should do, but we fail to do.

And I know I tend to think about the first, just things that it's like a big list of don'ts. But just think, even if you were somehow able to, quote unquote, remove all the bad things from your life, what about all the good things that you should be doing?

Because true goodness and perfection includes all the good things that God has called us to do and to be. And then it's not our own sinfulness that we just have to reckon with.

[25 : 34] In this broken and fallen world, we also have to reckon with the sin of others and just sickness. You know, when sickness, suffering, and other things in life interrupt you, it can feel like your whole plan for progress and self-improvement is just thwarted.

And all your plans are thrown out the window. Your first plan in every contingency plan out the window. So you see, there will always be something that pops up.

You know, something in your life that you struggle with. And if you dwell upon everything that could potentially go wrong, both from the inside or from the outside, you're just going to always have that nagging insecurity.

If you live your life as if it's ultimately about progress, you're either going to be disappointed perpetually, or you're going to somehow have to live in ignorant denial of how sinful you really are. If you're thinking that I'm, oh, Jeremy's just a Debbie Downer. Oh, just, why is he so cynical and pessimistic? Well, I don't think I am.

[26 : 53] I'll be honest, because I wrestled with that. Am I just being cynical as I get older? I've been inspired by what Paul says.

The Apostle Paul, the author of this letter, Ephesians, the author of like half the New Testament, is the man that God used to write all these books and plant all these churches.

If there ever was a hero of the faith, the Apostle Paul was. If there was ever someone who could live out that life of Christian progress, that was the Apostle Paul.

But towards the end of his life, he writes some pretty interesting things. Writing to the Roman church, he says this. Just listen carefully. He says, 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 to do, I do.

[28 : 03] I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do. But the evil I don't want to do, this I keep on doing.

And it just seems like he's laboring this point over and over and over. There's this disconnect. And later he even tells his protege, Timothy, that I'm the worst of all sinners.

And this is a man towards the end of his life reflecting on this life of being a prophet, of being the mouthpiece of God, of seeing a vision of God himself, planning churches, writing all this scripture. And so I don't think Paul was expressing some kind of false humility. That's not the Paul we see in all his writings. I think for all the progress that the apostle Paul saw in his life, at the end when he looked back, he really grasped the depths of sin within the human heart and how desperately he needed God's grace.

In a culture fixated with progress, the constant temptation is to think of our spiritual growth mainly in a linear way.

[29 : 30] You've probably just consciously or subconsciously thought of it that way. It's just like a straight line graph. You're just improving. There's a line, the trajectory towards more holiness, more purity, more sanctification.

And I'm not saying that can't happen. But practically speaking, the Christian life is more circular. And what I mean is that it's a simple process of repentance and faith again and again. We see the sinfulness in our lives and we repent, turning back to the arms of Christ, the loving arms of Christ.

Putting our faith back in this daily process of knowing God, responding to him. The linear might happen, but you're not worried about that because each day there is a moment for repentance and faith.

Each moment there's a moment for repentance and faith, even right now as you're sitting in your chairs. And let me be clear, spiritual growth will happen.

[30 : 46] And that's where I can be hopeful. But like physical fruit, the fruit of the spirit doesn't just sprout out before your eyes. You know, if you just stand there and stare at a fruit trying to measure your growth, you're going to be bored out of your mind.

Because you're not going to see it. And if you're focusing so much on the fruit, the plant will probably start dying. Right? But if you make sure that the plant stays connected to the source of life, to a loving relationship with our Savior Jesus, the fruit will grow.

And sooner or later you will see it. And more importantly, the people around you will see it. So just as a side of encouragement, you know, when you see fruit in people's lives, when you see them growing, affirm them.

Affirm their growth, their relationship in Christ. And that's what community is about, for us to encourage one another. I want to conclude by applying all of this to our lives right now.

And we're going to use the cross chart to help us. And I know, I know we've shown this to you many times before. But today I want to explain it in a slightly different way.

[32 : 06] So this is your relationship with Christ. And every day you're looking backward and you're looking forward. Communion, which we observed earlier, it calls us to remember that at a point in history, at the very far left of the chart, Jesus Christ came into our lives, into history.

He lived a perfect life to die for our sins so that we can be forgiven. And then there was a point in time, or maybe a few points even, if you don't remember a specific time, but clearly where there was a turn, a conversion point.

When you realize that, you realize what Jesus came and did on the cross. And then you accepted that gift of grace, that gift of forgiveness. And you chose to follow him, and the relationship began. That point might be today for some of you. It can be today. And then at the same time, looking forward, in communion, Paul also says, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim my death until I return.

And that's eternity, looking forward to the future. So you're looking to the past, to what Christ has done. You're looking towards the future, to eternity, when Jesus will return in victory and glory, and he'll make everything new.

[33 : 44] He'll make us new. He'll make us perfect again. And between those two points, looking back and looking forward, is today.

your relationship with him every day. You're walking in a loving relationship with Christ every day. And you're constantly aware of how sinful you really are, just like the Apostle Paul did. And you're constantly aware of how God really is, how holy and perfect he really is.

but you're also constantly aware of how amazing Jesus is. And that mercy and that relationship through Christ.

And every moment is shaped by that cross. That's your relationship. That cross today, that's your relationship with Christ.

[34 : 44] You see, the beauty of understanding your relationship with Christ and that it's not about progress, but it's about a relationship.

The beauty of that is you don't have to worry about whether you're making progress today or whether you're not making progress today. Because every last circumstance in your life is an opportunity to experience that relationship.

relationship. Because that's the real goal to experience, to cherish that relationship in the cross. You know, if things are going great right now, then you celebrate with Jesus first.

If things are going bad in your life right now and you've messed up, weep and mourn with Jesus first. And if someone on the street annoys you, turn to Jesus first.

If someone's hurt you, turn to your friend Jesus first. Turn to your father first. Every moment is a chance to learn Christ, to know him, to trust him, to receive his love, to respond in love.

[35 : 54] And inevitably, that relationship will become more and more precious to you. So at the end of the passage in chapter four, Paul tells us to put off the old self and to put on the new self.

That new self is a completely new identity and the original language actually suggests that we have already put off the old self and we've already put on the new self.

And since you already have this new identity and that new identity is going to be perfected in eternity, then why don't we just start living that out today?

That's right. Last week, we learned that our identity is Christ. And today, our walk is Christ.

Our Christian walk is Christ. That relationship is our spiritual walk. Christ is our life. It's everything we need.

[36 : 57] And that's why those martyrs in the past when they were persecuted, they could walk to the gallows to be hung. They could walk to the stake to be burned singing God's praises because they knew they would not be measured by any achievement they did.

They would be measured by the love and relationship that they had in Christ. That's why they could praise God walking to the gallows. And so think about this with me as you respond.

As we pray, how are you experiencing that relationship with Christ today? Do you know, do you feel, do you recognize that he's with you?

Has that relationship even begun for you today? And if not, let that be the beginning. Let today be the beginning of that relationship.

More specifically, what's going on in your life right now? What is that circumstance or ten circumstances that God is using to point you back to that relationship with him?

[38 : 10] To that relationship of unconditional love and acceptance? Let's actually take a moment right now to reflect on that. And just invite you to close your eyes and pray.

Reflect on what is going on in your life today. in the light of your relationship with Christ. God, we're going to keep reflecting on you on the cross.

And this isn't the end of the sermon. This is just the beginning of recognizing day after day that we need you. And our lives are defined by the relationship that we have with you.

So God, I pray that whatever circumstances are happening, whatever is going on, those circumstances instead of drawing them away from you, Lord, they would point us back to the relationship we have with you, God.

Lord, whatever it is that you need us to see this morning, pray that your spirit would prompt us, would convict us. God, if I walked to the gallows this morning because of persecution, because of those who hate you, Lord, would it be my praise, the praise on my lips that says, it is the love that I have from you.

[40 : 17] It is this relationship that I walk with you that has defined me. God, I pray that you continue to illuminate, Lord, those circumstances in our lives.

Whatever it is we're going through, Lord, we know you're with us, God. So we respond to you now in praise and prayer and repentance and in faith.

Amen.