

Our Identity

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Date: 06 March 2016

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[0 : 00] Good morning. I think someone's awake. My name's Chris. If it's your first time here, it's great to see you. If it's your hundredth time here, it's great to see you. It's great just to be together with God's people, worshipping him. And I pray that even as I speak, this is not just me speaking, that actually you hear God speaking to you through this. Over the first half of the year, if you've been in this church for any length of time, we're really wanting to focus on what it means to be rooted in God. And we just believe that if you see a tree which has solid roots, which has life-giving nutrients going into it, it will be healthy. If you have a tree which has no solid roots, which even in the midst of beautiful sunny days, if a tree has no roots, has no nutrients going into it, it will soon wither and die. But a tree that has solid roots will always bear fruit if there is nutrients, if there is living, life-giving, satisfying water that is flourishing into those roots.

And we want to be a church which is about producing fruit, which is about living out the gospel in our lives. But if we're to do that, we need to have good, solid roots and life-giving relationships and intimately knowing the one who will satisfy us more than anything else. That's why we've been looking at prayer. That's why we've been talking about the resurrection. That's why we're going to start a new short series on looking at what it means to have unity, union with Christ. Because we want to be rooted in something which is going to give us satisfying, life-enriching life so that we can do what God has called us to do in this city. Because the Bible calls us to do a lot of things, pray, give, serve. There's so many things that we can be all about doing, and this city loves to tell us to do loads of stuff. But if we don't get what we're talking about today right, then we will be living like a tree which is trying to produce fruit by itself, trying to squeeze out a few apples.

And we will be exhausted, and we will not enjoy the satisfying life that the gospel has caused us to get. So as we start thinking about this, what I'm going to say is really very counterintuitive to probably most of what you've ever been told, of what you've ever thought. And even if you're a Christian, you may know what I'm going to tell you, because I know what I'm going to tell you. I've heard it before. But actually, there is this kind of disconnect between what's up here and what's down here. And my prayer this morning is that what can be in some of your heads here begins to compute, and you get reception, and it begins to get deep down into your heart so that when we go out this morning, when we go out Monday to Friday, we will not just say we're a Christian and no knowledge here, but we will love Jesus and be thrilled by him.

So here's what I want to say. Right at the heart of Christianity is this. All Christian activity always flows out of your identity.

[3 : 53] All Christian activity is grounded and rooted in your identity. Let me put it another way. Whose you are shapes who you are, and who you are shapes what you do.

Okay? Did you get that? Whose you are shapes who you are, and who you are shapes what you do. Okay? Let me explain. If you're a prince or a princess, and you belong to your father, who's the king of the universe, do you not think that you might live a little differently than if you think you're a worthless beggar who has a father who is a layabout and a good-for-nothing?

Do you not think it will change the way that we view? And if we begin to get this idea wrong, we think our activity shapes our identity, then we will get all of Christianity wrong.

A couple of weeks ago, it was just before Valentine's Day, I received a text from my wife, and it said this. It said, I've just received a red rose. Now, I knew that I had not sent that rose.

So here's what's going on in my mind. I've got competition. And if you know me, I am terrible at gift-giving. It is really one of the things.

[5 : 11] I hate shopping. It's the worst thing. I'm terrible at it. And so my competitor has just shown me up. He's shown me just how bad I am in this area.

He's exposed my weakness. He's shown me that in this area, I'm not a very good husband. So my mind then goes into this little cycle where I think, okay, well, so how have I been a good husband? And so I start going through all my mind, a kind of list of the things that I've done well. And so I'm going, okay, I did a cooking list last week. And my friend's husband don't even get off the sofa in the evening. So that's 10 points for me.

And then I'm like, well, I took her on holiday. And that's got to be 20 points, okay, holiday. And then I remembered actually it was at least six months ago.

So that's probably minus 20 points. And I'm going through this whole kind of list in my mind of things that I've done, which I think show and prove that I'm a good husband. And I'm beginning to feel a little bit better about myself.

[6 : 12] But then the rose is still there. And so I ignore Fiona's text completely. I blank it out because I don't want to think about that rose and my competitor.

Later on in the afternoon, I suddenly remember something. And I've been thinking about this kind of all afternoon. I suddenly remember we'd been talking about going out for a meal sometime.

And I thought, yes, okay, perfect. Here's a great way to add to my points tally, okay. And so this will make her forget about the rose.

So I text her and say, shall we go out for dinner tonight? And she texts back and says, well, are you sure? I'm not too worried about going out tonight. But no, no, no, we've got to go out, okay. And I give five reasons why we should go out, okay.

There's not enough food in the fridge, you know, so many, all these different reasons. But underneath, I'm trying to prove that I am a good husband. So I meet Fiona, I'm playing it cool, you know.

[7 : 09] And she asks about the day. She asks, why are we going out tonight? I say, well, there's no food in the fridge, you know, all these other reasons. And then, as casually as I could, I say, so who gave you the rose?

Not that I'm mine, don't care. But, you know, and she says to me, Cartier. And I'm thinking, okay, so they got it from Cartier. Okay, it must be expensive. And I played it cool for another little while.

And then, finally, it was just getting to me so much. So I kind of said, so who gave you the rose?

And she says to me, Cartier. They were handing out roses on the street.

And it wasn't a very good one. But it was just they were handing them out. And suddenly I thought to myself, you complete prune. You idiot, Chris.

You've spent the whole of the afternoon trying to prove to yourself and to your wife that you were a good husband when I didn't even have to.

[8 : 09] She later said it was actually a joke that she sent it to me and thought I'd get the joke. But if Fiona had asked me, why didn't you get me a rose?

Do you know what I would have done? I'd have probably become very defensive. I'd have probably brought out my track record of all the other things that I've done. I'd probably have been very critical of the rose. Well, can't you see?

It's just not really a very good rose at all. I mean, and or maybe I'd have just gone quiet and inside been a little bit just feeling inadequate, a little bit resentful.

Got to try a bit harder next time. Let's plan the way to fix this situation. And do you know what?

Even after this, and I didn't actually want to tell Fiona about it.

I have told her now, so it's okay. But I didn't want to tell her about my true motivation for wanting to do all of these things. Because, you know, I was trying to hide from her.

[9 : 08] And I was beginning to be scared that I might be found out that actually the reason I was doing all of these things was not because I was really loving her, but it was because it was all about me. Because I wanted to prove me.

And I think when we stand next to somebody who is more loving than us, more generous than us, gives better gifts than us, more intelligent, more beautiful than us, because we begin to start feeling inadequate.

And we respond in different ways. And often we try and prove that we're better than that person or that we can make it.

But the problem is, if you're trying to prove yourself in life, it doesn't matter how hard you're trying, there will always be another rose. When you come face to face with a holy, loving God who is so much more loving, who always does things generously, graciously, mercifully, who is rich in mercy

as we look today, and you begin to compare that with your own life, do you know what it does? It does what Adam and Eve does. It makes you feel inadequate and weak. And so Adam and Eve hid in the garden because they couldn't face the shame of who they were. Because they were relying on their own performance and they were exposed when they saw God.

[10 : 30] That's how many of us live our lives here in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is competitive. It tells us that what you do equals who you are.

And we've been told we have to compete, we have to perform. So we view ourselves and our identity in light of our performance at work, at light of our performance as a mother or as a father, how well our kids are doing.

We view ourselves as a wife or a husband, a son or a daughter, a student, all in terms of the things that we have done and whether we have done them adequately or not. And we start to create evidence for ourselves and standards for ourselves that make us feel that if we've met these, then I'm okay, then I'm good, then I'm all right.

And if we feel that actually in some way we've failed the standard, or somebody else has failed the standard, we either feel bad about ourselves, negative, inadequate failures, or we judge other people, become critical of them, defensive of ourselves, blame shifting onto everybody else.

Because our identity has become more about what we do, and that's who we think we are. And the gospel says something different. So we're going to look in this passage today in Ephesians.

[11 : 48] Because I think, just ask your question, how, what is my identity based on?

What makes me think that I'm okay? What makes me think that I'm okay? So let's look into this passage. Paul is going to take a wrecking ball to the idea that if you stand on your performance in life to justify yourself, to give you some identity, then the fact is there's some bad news for you. You're worse than you think you are. That's what we're going to start with. You're worse than you think you are. But then he's going to say, there is good news because your identity is in whose you are.

And that is Christ. That will be the second thing we look at. So let's dive into Ephesians 2. You should have it in your bulletin. It says, and this is pretty heavy stuff.

He says, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

[13 : 16] Okay? This is heavy stuff. You're worse than you think you are. Paul is saying three things about the Ephesians' past performance. He's saying, Before Christ, you were dead.

Not physically, but spiritually dead. On the outside, you looked alive, but on the inside, in relation to God, you were dead.

Now you can say, I'm a very good person. I've done all these great things. But God is saying, if I look in your heart towards me, you are dead. You know, we have that phrase in English where we say, I'm dead to her.

That means the relationship is over. There is no life in this relationship. There's no pulse in this relationship. The relationship is flatlining. Okay? This is gone.

There's not even a hint of life. You're a corpse in God's eyes. Heavy stuff. And he says, God doesn't hang out with corpses.

[14 : 17] And people say, it doesn't matter what religion you choose, you can find your own way to God. But Paul is saying, no, if you're dead, if you're dead, only outside help can resurrect you.

You can't resuscitate yourself because you're dead. Now, why does he say you're dead? Because secondly, he says, you and me, you and I, we were enslaved to sin.

He says, you walked in trespasses and sins. Now, literally, the word trespasses means you continually go beyond the boundaries of what you should. You choose the wrong path.

And sins means, the word means, falling short of the target. A bit like, it's a darts player who can't even reach the board. That's what you and I naturally are like.

And he says, the reason why we do these things, why we're this kind of walking dead in all of these things, who chooses the wrong path, misses the target, what God has called you and me to be, is because we're a slave.

[15 : 27] A slave to a number of things. Now, we think we're free, right? We think we're free. We talk about free will.

You know, I have free will. I have freedom of choice. I can choose to do all these great things. But actually, Paul is saying, after sin comes into the world, this sense of rebellion against God, saying, God, we don't need you.

Nobody in this world has truly free will. Naturally. Because, verse 3 says, we carry out the desires of the body and mind. We are slaves to our passions and desires.

We do what we want to do. These passions and desires are shaped by the world around us. We follow what everybody else in the world says. And that word world means not just physical world. It means the spiritual world, which says, God, I don't want to have to rely on you. I want to rely and do things by myself, my way. And I'm going to prove myself that I am good enough to do it.

[16:28] You know, I think why we're so obsessed in our culture with certain kinds of appearance, certain kinds of status in our society. It's because we desire to belong.

And culture shapes us to tell you this is the way you can belong. If you look a certain way, if you have a certain job, if you do a certain, live a certain behavior. Are we free?

Well, I know at my school, when I'm growing up, we had a non-uniform day. We loved non-uniform day. Because we always had to wear uniform. Do you know what everybody chose to wear on non-uniform day?

Everybody was in jeans and t-shirt. Everybody wore the same thing. We thought we were free. But everybody chose exactly the same thing.

Why? Because we had a desire to fit in, to belong, to be accepted. And the way the world around us worked that, shaped all of that to be in a certain way.

[17:30] That's what the Bible is saying about the way that we sin. Jonathan Edwards, famous American preacher said, we're free to choose what we desire most.

The reason we cannot please God is that we don't want to. You know, we want to justify myself in my own way, with my own goodness, with all the things that I've done right, like me with my little list. I want to prove that I, by myself, can do it, and I'm good enough. And we create standards to do this. We create wonderful standards. Like for me, I have a standard which helps me to feel that I am a good person.

It's being on time. You see, if I feel that I can be on time, then I feel like I am better than other people who are not on time. And so I hate not being on time.

Even yesterday, I cut my wife short when she needed to talk to me because I absolutely have to be on time, not a minute late. I'm British, but that's the way the world works, you know.

[18:34] And even if I think I'm running late, but I managed to get there just in time, do you know how I feel? I just have that sense of satisfaction.

I made it. Aren't I a good, punctual person? And my identity is now secure if I am punctual.

But I will trample on my wife just to prove to myself and to others that I'm a good, punctual person because I have a standard which I have made, and I think if I make that, then I'm good enough and I can prove that I'm a good person.

But I will not even be a minute late for my wife because my identity is at stake because we create these standards and we all have them. We all have them.

Just think what's frustrated you this week about other people and you will probably find a standard there which you have, which you think, if I keep this, I am good and I can look down on other people.

[19:37] But when we don't look up to a holy God, we see a standard which is down here and we fail to see the standard that God has got for us.

Paul says that when we live like all of this, we are not just following our own way, but we're actually controlled by Satan, the prince of the power of the air.

We're under his authority. We're shaped by what everyone else tells us and we are dead to God.

Great news. That's just what you wanted to hear this morning.

Because the last thing of that, those three things, is that Paul says, well, we're under his judgment as well because God hates our sense of self-righteousness about our standards that we put up.

Justifying, trying to prove myself, my defensiveness. We're not just in the doghouse with God, we're in the morgue. And though I can appear to do a lot of good things, I can appear to do all kinds of things right, but a relationship is fundamentally about the heart.

[20:46] It's about my heart. And if my heart, God looks at it and he says, even the good things that I try and do, like taking my wife out for a meal, so often I do it because it's actually more about

me than it's really about God.

Tim Keller says something like this, which is challenging. To become a Christian, we must repent of the things we've done wrong.

But if that's all we do, you may remain a hypocrite. To truly become a Christian, we must also repent of the reasons we did anything right. Pharisees, religious people, only repent of their sins, the things they've done wrong.

But Christians repent of the very roots of their righteousness, the things that they think they've done right. The sin of seeking to be our own savior, our own Lord.

And if you're not a Christian today, Christianity is not about making you a better person, giving you an upgrade. It's about transforming you to a new identity. So that's the second thing.

[21 : 50] We're dead. We're worse than we think we are. But in Christ, whose we are, changes our identity. So turn with me.

The second part says, But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with Christ. It is by grace, by grace you've been saved.

And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He said, If you rely on your performance, you're far worse than you ever think you are.

But here is some amazing news. There is a famous, a semi-famous tycoon son who the journal in Hong Kong, who journalists have nicknamed Package Lau.

I don't know if some of you know who Package Lau is. But I didn't know. My wife explained how this guy came to be called Package Lau. Basically, there was a dating show where a couple of guys, one a performing arts studio, one this rich tycoon son, were there having a conversation.

[22 : 54] And based on their answers, some women behind the screen would choose which one they'd most like to date. And as far as I understand, when the time came to choose based on the conversation, most of the women chose the person they couldn't see but the performing arts student because he was so much more competent and confident in the way he spoke.

They opened the curtain to reveal the two people. And then suddenly, the host asked which one they would like to choose. And all the women changed their minds and said, we want to choose Mr. Lau, the tycoon son.

And the host said, why? And they said, well, the package is better. Because if you get Mr. Lau, you get everything that Mr. Lau has.

But Paul is saying here, there is a better package than living by your own performance. And it starts off, this package, with two of the most beautiful words in the Bible, but God.

But God. I was dead in the morgue, flatlining the walking dead, a corpse, but God. Not me, God.

Being rich, richer than package Lau, rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us.

[24 : 21] On the cross, his love poured down upon us, taking our death that we deserved on himself and he made us alive with him.

He didn't make you alive to make you a better you. Because the Bible says, when we, when Christ died, spiritually, we die with him if we put our trust and our faith in him.

We die to the old way of performing, but we rise and we are raised with Christ to a new victorious life with him, with freedom and power. He ascended into heaven to a place of honor and glory and victory.

And we ascended with him in a spiritual union. Spiritually, we, if you are a Christian who knows Jesus this morning, you are seated spiritually with the one who rules over the universe and you are in a place of honor with him.

And what have you done to deserve it? Absolutely nothing. Because you're dead. And when you're dead, you don't get marks for your performance. And it's only because of Christ because we are united to him.

[25 : 43] It's about him. It's not my performance. It's his performance. He is perfect. He loved like we never loved. He followed the law like we never followed the law. My performance sucks.

His performance is amazing. And now, we are united with him. Now, Martin Luther, who's a famous reformer, he put this idea of this union with Christ like this.

He said, it's like the story of a great king marrying a sex worker who's been on the streets, ragged, torn, disgraced, a wretch, shivering in the corner of the street waiting for her next client.

No thought of anything else. And along comes the great king and says, I want to marry you. He has the choice of any bride that he could choose, but he chooses her.

Now, this sex worker can't make herself the king's wife by anything she does. There's too much brokenness to attract him in any way. But he takes the initiative.

[26 : 45] And he says to her, and he makes her his own by a marriage vow. And he says, all that I am, I give to you. All that I have, I share with you.

And so in marriage, he gives her the status of royalty. All that is his. A better package than package lao.

And she then turns to him in the ceremony and says, all that I am, I give to you. All that I have, I share with you. And so this sinner shares with King Jesus, all of her shame, all of her sin, all of the guilt, all of the inadequacy, all of those things, the rose which exposes me.

He takes it all. And so now, as a Christian, I look at Christ, and when I look at my sins, I can say, if I have sinned, yet my Jesus has not sinned, all his is mine, and all mine, my sins, my death, my damnation, is his.

This is what it means by grace. It's grace. You did nothing. He did everything. It's a gift to you.

[28 : 07] And what you do with a gift is you receive it. But imagine you say, well, the package is too good to be true. What have I got to do? What have I got to do?

That's what we want to ask here in Hong Kong. What have I got to do? If someone gives you a gift of a new Ferrari and says, hey, this is for your birthday, and you take out a two dollar bill and say, hey, thanks, but let me just give you something towards it.

That's an insult. That's an insult. When God says, it's by my grace that I save you, he's not saying, now I want you to just try a little bit harder just to make sure, and I'll give you something, but you've got to make sure you give me a lot back.

He's saying, no, your only response is what Jeremy said earlier, it's worship. Your response is gratitude. This is grace.

Everything we do now as a Christian is not because you have to prove and earn God's love. You can never earn it because dead people cannot earn anything. He has loved us.

[29 : 22] He has taken the initiative. If you are a Christian in Christ, you are secure. He doesn't divorce his children. He doesn't divorce his bride. You are safe with him.

And it's him, not you. That's the issue. Because of his performance, this means we're no longer slaves to sin.

I don't have to sin. I'm free. And when I sin this week, that is not who I am now in Christ.

I'm living according to my old ways of living. I'm living out my old identity because I've got identity amnesia. I've forgotten who I am. And when God calls you not to sin, when we have all those things that we say we should do as Christians, be good people, help the old lady across the road, even if she doesn't want to.

You know, all those things that we think this is what a good Christian should be. And we think that if we've done them, we're better, or if we haven't done them, then somehow God, maybe he loves us still because we know that up here, but we don't think he really likes us.

[30 : 37] And God tells us, and Paul is telling us, to actually repent of that attitude which says, my performance is somehow meriting something with God.

Because when God calls you to do stuff, he's saying, not this is going to make you who you are.

You already are somebody. You don't have to become somebody. You already are somebody in me, so now live out who you are.

That's what he's saying. And we say, I'm a terrible sinner. I'm hopeless. I've done this wrong. But Christ says, I know.

I know. You're worse than you think you are. But I'm so much better than you imagine that I could be. And with that sin, you know, I struggle with this because I still see that I have patterns where I continue to do the things that I know I shouldn't do.

I continue to try and prove myself. And what's going on there? Well, I have a friend who was, he went to prison. And in prison, he became institutionalized.

[31 : 46] And in prison, you know, you get your meals done for you, you have certain set routines and you just kind of become passive about certain things and there's a way of operating when you're in prison that you've got to do things a certain way. And when he finally came out, he really struggled because, you see, he built up all these habits of what it was like to be in prison.

And he came out and now he was free. But he still tried to act like he was still in prison because he didn't, he had to learn what it was to live out in his new identity.

And that's like what it is for many of us. We still struggle with some of the old habits that we have day in, day out. But when we look at them, we think, oh, that means God doesn't love me or if I see that, that makes me a bad person.

And God's saying, yes, you already are a bad person. I knew that before I chose you. But, because of God, his great mercy and love for me, that is not my identity.

I am a new creation. I am united with Christ. His performance, not my performance. It's liberation. That's why Paul writes the book of Ephesians and he spends the first three chapters saying, this is who you are.

[32 : 58] This is who you are. If you haven't got it, this is who you are. In him, you are forgiven. In him, you are redeemed. In him, you are inheritors with Christ. Have you got it yet?

Okay, you've been made alive. You've been seated with Christ. You've been raised. You are seated with the King of glory. Have you got it yet? And he tells you over three chapters again and again and again and then finally in chapter four he says, okay, now if you finally got it, this is how you live. And we do it the other way around. We do, okay, now God, what do you want me to do? Okay, here's all the things I've got to do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, and then maybe that's going to make me a child of God and he says, no, you got it the wrong way around. So think about it for yourself. When you mess up last week, this week, what's your response? Some of us minimize what we do. We think, you know, like I did, I minimize the areas where I struggle so that I try and build up my little sense of righteousness on my other side. And we think, well, God can forgive me anyway.

[34 : 05] It's a cheap, easy thing to do. He can do it, no problem. But the thing is, God doesn't see things that way when you see a holy God.

He doesn't want a stinking old corpse. He doesn't hang out with that kind of person. He hangs out with people who he has taken the initiative to bring himself into relationship with.

So do you see your sin as something that's minimal or do you see your sin as something that makes you just a failure and a wretch and you wonder how God could love you?

Trapped in guilt and shame. I don't know. I don't know what you've been doing this week, but if you rely on your performance to give you any kind of standing before God, let me tell you, you're in big trouble.

You're in big trouble. But the grace of God says, when I look at my sin and I think, man, this is who I'm supposed to be, but actually, this is what I live.

[35 : 12] How can I be that kind of person? Doesn't God know what I've done? And he says, yes, absolutely, I know what you've done. That's why you don't rely on your performance. You rely on me. We're no longer under God's judgment.

We're made alive. We have a robe of righteousness that's what the Bible says. We are clothed with Christ, which means when God looks at you, he sees Christ.

And when he sees Christ, you know what he says? He doesn't say, hmm, could do better. He looks at Christ and says, beautiful, forgiven, acceptable, I'm pleased.

Not you, but him. And you are united with him. That's the package. You get him, all of him. He gets all of you. Who gets the better deal?

We do. And the thing is, it's free. This idea of union with Christ, you can sum up in one phrase, Christ is my life.

[36 : 19] He's my identity. He's my performance. He's everything to me. So let's think, what does that actually mean?

Because that sounds wonderful. But, if you're like me, and you think about the story of the rose, I do this kind of proving myself all the time.

Hong Kong breeds it. If I believed I knew who I was in Christ, with that story of the rose, as I was beginning to try and prove myself in my mind, I might have stopped myself and said, after I was kind of going through the list and said, Chris, stop being such an idiot.

You're a child of God. You're accepted. You're loved by him. You don't have to now prove that you are somehow some great husband when you know there's areas that you're not good at.

I can be free to admit that there are areas where I'm inadequate. How would that change my situation? Because it might not change the way my wife responded.

[37 : 25] I have no idea how she'll respond. But I might have started looking honestly at my inadequacy and just instead of covering up, I might have asked God to say, forgive me. Forgive me for the areas in my life where I don't measure up.

Forgive me. And I might have asked God to help me with grace in this area to change. And I still need to change because I still haven't bought her a rose. I might still have gone out of the meat for a meal with her.

But this time, I wouldn't have made it, it wouldn't have been all about me. It would have been about thinking, how could I actually love my wife in this way? My motivation, the action could have been the same, but the motivation would have been entirely different.

And if she'd have asked me whether I'd got anything for her for Valentine's Day or not, I could have been honest and admitted it. And can you think how many arguments you might save, how much stress you might avoid if we weren't desperately trying to prove ourselves with our performance? Some of us, this is 2016, if you didn't know. And some of us, this is going to be a tough year. financially, the job markets, it's going to be a tough year for some of us, maybe many of us.

[38 : 53] But many of us have found our identities in our work. And if you are called into the office and told you have no job, is your life going to be over?

Is your identity going to be crushed? Disappointed, yes. But is your work what really gives you a sense of being okay in the world?

Or would Christ be enough if you'd had nothing? Do you know that song that we sang earlier, the It Is Well? You know the middle chorus part of that? You know the story of how that's written?

It's written by a guy called Horatio Spofford, who about 150 years ago, he was a wealthy lawyer, very successful, four beautiful daughters, a son, wife, everything was going well.

And then his son dies. And then there's a Chicago great fire, and it destroys most of his investments that he has. And then, two years later, his daughters and his wife are taking a ship over across the Atlantic, and the ship sinks.

[40 : 04] Four of his daughters drown. Only his wife survives. And as he is taking the ship to go back over to see his wife after tragedy, the things which had made his whole world work had been snatched away from him.

he writes this song. He says, It is well. It is well with my soul. Because he had begun to understand that when your identity is in all these other things, any of them can be snatched away at a moment's notice.

But he has something which his life is based on, which is so much more secure, which is union with Christ. And if I have Christ, all that I have is mine.

All he has is mine. And though everything may be stripped away, my identity is secure. So, what would it be like if you were going to work tomorrow?

If you go into your families, go into your classrooms, and you know that in all the busyness, your identity is not at stake. You have not got to prove anything.

[41 : 23] Sure, you've got to work hard. It's competitive. But even when you're busy, how much of your busyness is not just the work? It's actually the work under the work, which is the proving yourself, which actually wraps you up and stresses you out and makes you so unable to think about anything else.

And Christ says, I want to liberate you from you. If you look to me, that's where our identity is. And we need to repent and say, Father, and I struggle with this, but Father, I found my identity in so many other things.

Help me to see you. And all that I have is found in you. That Jesus, you are my identity. You are my security.

Whatever storm comes this year, I am utterly safe, secure. My identity is not at stake. And then, as we get that, we can go out and live that identity to love people as God has called us to.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[42 : 45] Amen. Maybe just have a think for a moment, just, as you think about what really, what really does make me feel like I'm okay, where are you trying to prove yourself as a good parent, as a good wife or husband or son or daughter.

Maybe you're trying to prove that you're a good Christian by being very busy, being active, doing lots of things. But Christ comes to us now and says, I want you to see whose you are.

When you look at me, I'm the king who owns the universe. My love is boundless. Your sin may be great, but my love is greater.

My mercy knows no end. But I want you to stop trusting in your own performance. I want you to run to me.

I want you to find your security in me so that you can be free from being so wrapped up in yourself to really love the people that I've placed around you.

[44 : 23] Please open our eyes, Father, to see this. I know I'm a spiritual identity amnesiac. I forget who I am all the time.

Please help us as a church to remember who you've made us to be. That when we go out here, we go out on Monday morning, we go knowing that we're loved, we're secure because of you.

Nothing to prove, nothing to lose because of your grace. Amen. Amen.