

Are You New?

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. It's great to see you this morning. Good to be here with you. If you don't know me, my name is Eric. I'm one of the guys on staff here at Watermark Church.

It's great to be with you today. About six years ago, I woke up one morning and I was frustrated. There was stuff happening at my school that I wasn't really a fan of, and it left me frustrated.

And as I reflected on the things that were happening, I decided that the way to fix these frustrations was a change of scenery. I would get out of Dallas where I was going to school.

Things would be different. Things would be new. Things would be better. At that same time, one of my friends had just come back from an internship that he had done in Hong Kong. And he wouldn't stop talking about how amazing of a city Hong Kong is and how great of a time he had had doing this internship.

And I thought, hey, I want to get out of Dallas. He says Hong Kong is amazing. Perfect combo. I applied for the same internship that he had had, and I got the job.

[1 : 09] And a couple months later, I was on the plane heading to Hong Kong. I landed in the city, and everything was bright and shiny and new and amazing, and I loved it. And everything felt better.

All of my problems were gone. Life was good. For a couple months. And then Hong Kong became the old, the normal, the standard, the regular.

And as I got settled in here, I realized that the problems that I was running away from in Dallas weren't things that were specific to Dallas. They were things that were specific to me. And that by changing my scenery, that that wouldn't fix my problems.

There was something bigger and something deeper that needed to change inside me than just my location for things to change. And we're just coming out of the Christmas season, or we're still sort of in it, but we're in that awkward in-between phase.

And I think for a lot of us, we have this type of attitude in this season, especially for children. If I just get that one gift, my life will be better.

[2 : 18] If I just get the new iPhone, then everything will be fine. Or if you have kids who are in maybe first or second grade, if I just get that cool water bottle that sprays the mist out of the top, then I can be the cool kid in class.

Or maybe if my spouse gets me that new model of the Tesla, then things will be good. And we laugh at this because we know none of these things are really going to change our lives for the better.

We're adults. We've gotten enough Christmas gifts over the year that we know you open up the gift, it's really exciting and new, and by now, two days later, meh, it's just another toy that we have.

It might make life a little more convenient, but nothing is substantially changed in our lives. We're adults. We think bigger things will change our lives. We think, yeah, the Christmas gift won't make things new, but my New Year's resolution next week, that's going to change things.

Just wait until you see who I become when I go to the gym three times a week. Or we think, maybe if I just had a new job and I wasn't stuck with this oppressive and terrible boss, things would be different.

[3 : 34] I'd be a new person. If I had a little bit bigger flat, I would be so much less stressed and more organized. Or maybe, like me, you thought, a change of scenery is what I need.

I just need to get out of this city, go somewhere else, go somewhere new, and everything will be okay. But the problem is, none of these things will fix us. All of these things are changing our circumstances and changing the things around us, and the issue with each and every one of us each and every one of us have issues, and they're issues that are much deeper than the circumstances around us.

And if we want true, lasting, substantial change in our lives, we don't need change of circumstances. We need a change of identity.

And so today, as we head into the new year, I want to ask you a big question. Are you new? Not are your circumstances new, but are you new?

And to help us answer this question, I have three diagnostic questions for us. Number one, where are you? Number two, what are you?

[4 : 45] And number three, what are you doing? I know that's cryptic, intentionally. But follow along, and you'll find out what I'm talking about. So in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 17, it says, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

And my first question for us is, where are you? Are you in Christ or not? And I know this phrase of being in Christ is not something that we talk about necessarily a whole lot in the world at large today.

Maybe we reference it in church, but even then, we'll do it in a way that sort of assumes that everyone knows what we're talking about when no one actually does. And then everyone just nods along politely, and then we move on to the next thing because no one wants to ask the question and be that person.

But what does it mean to be in Christ? I think Jesus gives us a good picture, a word picture of this, when he talks in John 15 about being in him like branches are in a vine.

He says, I am like a plant, and you guys are like branches that grow off of the plant, like this guy right here. And he says, you need to be in me.

[6 : 06] Now what does it mean for this little leaf right here to be in this plant? If I just set it right there. Are we good? It's in the plant? Physically, it's located next to the plant, inside the plant.

But no, it's not talking about just physically being located there. It's talking about having a life-giving, vital connection where the plant is supplying all of the nutrients and needs that this leaf needs for life.

That this leaf life comes from the plant. That there is, it's not just proximity. It's not just, oh, we're touching now. Tied it on there and it's going to stay.

But it's actually that there is a life-giving connection where the nutrients for life that this leaf needs come from the plant. And when we rip the leaf off from the plant, like I just did, it's dead.

It still looks alive, but it's dead. And it's only a matter of time until the symptoms of death start setting in on the leaf. And when the Bible talks about us being in Christ, what it means is that we have a vital, life-giving connection with Christ where all of the sources and nutrients of our life, not physically, but spiritually, come from him.

[7 : 24] So does that mean showing up in church? Is that what it means to be in Christ? I think using this analogy, showing up in church is sort of like setting the leaf on top of the plant and saying, there we go, we're good.

But it's very easy to be in church and not be in Christ. Does it mean reading our Bibles every day? Maybe that would be like taking some string and tying this leaf back on here.

It looks good. Can't tell from the outside that anything's wrong. But it's only a matter of days or weeks before the greenness starts to wear off the leaf and it turns brown.

And the Bible says that we have a fundamental problem because each and every one of us is what the Bible calls a sinner. It means we've rebelled against God.

We were created to have a perfect relationship with God, to be connected to him, to have this relationship with him be the source of life for us.

[8 : 26] And yet each and every one of us looked at God, looked at his commands and said, no God, I know better than you how life works. I have a better understanding of where I need to get my nutrients from.

I'm going to tear myself off, separate myself, and try and provide my own sustenance in life. I think that my job is going to give me meaning more than you are.

And so I'm going to do whatever it takes to keep my job, even if that means cutting corners and lying on the accounting sheets for my boss, because I need this job more than I need you.

And we go along throughout life, and every time we disobey and rebel against God, we separate ourselves from him a little bit further. And like this leaf, when we're cut off from that source, we're dead, and it's only a matter of time until the symptoms start showing up.

And what the Bible says is that Jesus came to the earth, that he lived a perfect life in this perfect connection with God, and that he died the death that we deserve so that we can be reconnected to God.

[9 : 44] In planting, in agriculture, there's something called grafting, where you take something from one plant, and you cut it a certain way and bind it to another plant, and actually they can become one plant again, even though they've been separated.

And the Bible talks about our connection with Christ being like being grafted into a plant, where even though we were separated, even though we were far off and weren't connected and receiving this nutrition for life that we need from him, that he came and made a way for us to be connected to God again.

And I don't know enough about grafting to save this leaf, so sorry. But the Bible says that through Christ and through the work that he has done, we have an opportunity to be in him, to be connected to him in this vital and life-giving way.

And so there are two places today as we gather here that we can be. We can be in Christ, or we can be not in Christ. And it's very important that we answer this question.

Where are you? Are you in Christ? Do you have this relationship with God where you have been forgiven for your rebellion against him, where you have trusted in him, and where you are now receiving the nutrients for your spiritual life from him and his word?

[11 : 03] Or are you separated from him? The Bible talks a lot about the benefits of those who are in Christ. It says that in Christ, we have forgiveness.

In Christ, we are made alive to God. In Christ, we have eternal life. In Christ, we have freedom. In Christ, we become the children of God. And the list goes on and on and on.

And what that means is that if you are here today and you are in Christ, then you have these things. And if you are here today and you're not in Christ, then you've cut yourself off from these things.

And so what difference does it make whether we're in Christ or not? It makes a big difference. Because externally, the actions can look the same between people who are in Christ and who aren't.

They can both go to church. They can both read their Bibles. They can both do service within the community. But the difference is the motivation behind these things and the heart behind these things.

[12 : 09] When someone is in Christ, they're going to serve in the community out of an overflow of the love that they've received from God.

They're receiving all of this abundance of life from God. And it's like a cup that's overflowing. They want to share out of the excess of what they have.

They have their identity secure and they go out and they serve. But someone who's not in Christ on the outside can look the same. They can go out, do the exact same acts of service within the community.

But they're like an empty cup that's trying to fill themselves up with meaning by what they're doing. So they go out and they work and they work and they try really hard to build this identity through their service.

And it can work for a while just like the leaf can stay green for a while. But eventually what happens is your identity becomes so tied to what you do that you have to keep working even when you've worked yourself to the bone and you're tired and you're exhausted and you know that you need a break.

[13 : 18] You have to keep going because the moment you stop you lose your identity because your identity is tied up in what you're doing. You've been working so hard to build up an identity through these acts of service and through doing good things.

You can't live without them. You become dependent on them. Where someone who is in Christ who has that identity secure before they start is able to go and to serve and to love and to rest and to not fear losing their identity in that process of rest.

And so as we start out today where are you? Are you in Christ or are you not? The verse continues.

It says if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold the new has come. It brings us to our second question.

What are you? Are you new or are you old? The verse is very clear that when someone is in Christ they are a new creation.

[14 : 35] And the new has come and the old has passed away and there has been a transformation that has happened in their lives. And this transformation isn't just okay God's given you a second chance time to go try harder this time.

It's not extra effort. It's not extra exertion. But it's a fundamental change of identity. They cease to be the old person and become someone new.

And I think that for those of us who are in Christ this is something that a lot of us have a very hard time understanding. because we become a Christian and we look up and the world is exactly the same.

And we don't feel any different. And we look around and we're like what has changed? And we think well since I'm a Christian I should be reading my Bible and we get to this verse and we think oh well that's supposed to be true about me but I don't necessarily feel like it's true.

And so I think a lot of people in the church when they have that experience say alright this is supposed to be true of me I don't feel like it's true so I have to go out there and try and make it be true.

[15 : 52] We go put out this effort to make this idea of being new true because we feel like it's not already true in our lives. It's sort of like imagine this scenario with me.

When I was a kid my grandfather had a crabapple tree in his front yard. Now crabapples aren't really edible they're like mini super sour apples that apparently can be used in certain dishes but even then his was an old sick crabapple tree so the apples that it would grow not only were they tiny and really sour but they were also rotten.

You weren't going to eat the apples that grew on this tree and it wasn't the prettiest tree ever and then it would leave these little apples scattered all over the lawn every fall. So imagine that one day my grandmother had said hey I want that tree out of our yard.

I want a nice new good apple tree there so we can enjoy the fruit from the apple. And my grandfather says alright I got this and he goes out to the garage and he grabs a huge piece of plywood and some paint and he sets up his shop and he paints a picture of a nice new beautiful tree and he carries this big piece of plywood outside and he sets it down on the ground in front of the tree and he walks inside and he says hey there it is new tree.

Now is my grandmother going to be fooled by that? Of course not. Is anyone going to be fooled by that? No. And even if she was fooled by that temporarily the next moment that she goes outside to the front yard my grandfather has to scramble because the picture is obviously only going to cover one side of the tree.

[17 : 43] So he's got to run out there and pick up the picture and just constantly move it around the tree as she's moving around the yard so that he doesn't get busted for what he's done.

What he's done is not going to be effective at giving new life to the tree. He's going to be living in fear and anxiety of getting caught the entire time and he's going to be exerting himself and putting out insane amounts of effort to keep up the lie and all the while there's still a dead tree behind the pretty mask.

I think a lot of us think this is what happens when God makes us new. He just paints a new sign he puts it out there and then we are responsible from now on for carrying around this sign to cover up who we really are.

We're afraid and anxious that we're going to get busted and we're exerting ourselves and exhausting ourselves because we know that what we're showing to everyone else is not the truth and at the same time we feel like we're dying inside.

God. And guys I have good news for you. That type of change is not what this verse is talking about when it says that anyone who's in Christ is a new creation.

[19 : 06] No this verse is talking about something radically totally different. It's like if my grandfather had gone out there and he had dug up the old tree he had thrown it out and he had put a new tree in its place.

And the new tree may look very similar on the outside to the old tree that was there before. My grandmother might even go out and be like is this really a different tree?

Because it looks very similar to the one that was here before. But at harvest season when the fruit grows on the new tree they will see a difference because the healthy tree is going to grow healthy fruit.

And when the fruit grows they're going to see these are not rotten sour crab apples but these are real apples. And the Bible says that that is the type of change that God affects in our lives.

Even though we may not subjectively feel like that is true the Bible says the moment that we trust in Jesus for salvation God affects that change in our lives.

[20 : 14] objectively true whether we feel it or not. And so our job is not to go out and hold up a sign to hide what's behind us but rather to live the reality that we have a new identity.

And I know the feeling of being that person who's holding up the sign running around while you feel like you're dead inside. I know from experience it is exhausting. It is not fun. It is not where I would want any of us to be.

And if you are here today and you feel like you're in that place where you're just trying so hard and you feel like you can never get it right I would encourage you to find me or Chris or Jeremy and talk with one of us after service and we'd love to pray with you about that.

Because the reality is that Christ came not to give us a new facade so that we can put an effort to make everyone else think we're new. But Christ came to transform us from the inside and to make us new.

Like the new tree in the yard. It may look similar on the outside. The harvest is going to show the reality that there is something new.

[21 : 35] The old isn't just hiding, waiting to be discovered behind the new face. the old has been completely uprooted and replaced by the new.

So where are you? Are you in Christ or not? What are you? Are you new? Are you old? Are you old but holding up a mask that says that you're new to the world?

And then my third question for us today, what do you do? we've already mentioned the old person and the new person, the person who's not in Christ and the person who is in Christ, can live lives that on the outside look very similar.

But the heart behind it is very different. The motivation behind that life is very different. And so the fruit that comes out of that life will be very different. Just as the old apple tree and the new apple tree can look similar, but at harvest time, the old tree is going to grow rotten, bad apples.

And the new tree is going to bear new, fresh, beautiful, delicious apples. The old man, the old person, is going to grow fruit or produce results in their lives that are in line with their old identity.

[22 : 56] And the new person is going to produce results in their lives that are in line with their new identity. reality. And so how does a new creation live?

If you read through these verses that we have right here, there's a list. And the list is too big for us to go through entirely with the time that we have left today. But there's two things that I want to hit on, two things I want to talk about from this list that are major markers of the fact that we are new, that we are changed, that we are different.

And the first is in verse 20, slash 18 through 20, I'll read it all.

It says, All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

[24 : 13] And what it's saying here is that if we are the new creation, then one way that our lives are to be fundamentally different is that we are to be what he calls ministers of reconciliation, or ambassadors for Christ.

Christ. If you think about what an ambassador does, they're a foreigner. They come in from an outside country to a foreign land as a representative of their government.

The Bible says that when we become Christians, we are made new. We're not the same old people as we were before. We're something different.

We no longer represent just humanity, but we represent a new king, Christ. And Christ, our king, has sent us to the world as his ambassadors to deliver a very, very important message to everyone around us.

And that message is that we are alienated from God, but God, in his great love, wants us to be reconciled to him. Now, this is something that is unique to people who are in Christ and who have been made new creations because if you haven't experienced this reconciliation with God yourself, it's very, very difficult to invite others to experience that reconciliation and new relationship.

[25 : 41] But if we are new creations and we've experienced this reconciliation with God, and we have this new relationship with him and we are new creations, then he says that's not something that's supposed to stay with us.

It's something that we're supposed to take and spread to the world as his ambassadors. We are God's primary means of taking this message into the world if we are his people.

Which means that ministry is actually not just the job of the people on staff at the church. It's the job of everyone who is in Christ. People think of me as the student minister or something along those lines, but actually there are way more students here who should be doing student ministry than me.

Because there are way more students here than there are of me. And every student who is in Christ should be a minister to the other students in their school. If you are working in a business place, then you should be in business place ministry.

Because that is what Christ has called every Christian in the business place to be. A minister of reconciliation who as an ambassador of God goes out and tells the world around them that God wants a relationship with you.

[27 : 02] And this is a distinctive mark of someone who is a new creation. So how do we do that? What does that look like? Maybe if you are a parent, you have kids, they are fighting, and you talk to them about the need to reconcile with each other, but also at the same time mention the fact that even more important than needing to reconcile with each other, they are alienated from God, and they need to be reconciled in that relationship.

Maybe if you have a disagreement with someone, something that you really want to win, that you learn to swallow your pride and let the other person win.

That's weird. People in the world won't get it. Maybe they'll even ask you questions. Why? When you had the right to win that argument, your arguments were good.

The other person had no ground to stand on. If you had pressed hard enough, you could have won it. But it will open up opportunities to share with them that I serve a God who, when we had wronged him, came and took the initiative to be reconciled to us.

And I want to emulate that to the world around me and show examples of even when I'm right, even when I can get my way and I have the right to do it, that I give it up and I serve for the sake of reconciliation, for the sake of maintaining that relationship.

[28 : 39] relationship. And I do it so that you can see how amazing of an experience it is and so that hopefully you will want to be reconciled to God. And so God calls us to be these ministers of reconciliation, people who go out and show the world the wonders and joys of being reconciled to him and who call people to be reconciled to God.

So if you're here today and you haven't yet entered into this relationship with God, if you haven't gotten to the point where you are now in Christ, I would encourage you to be reconciled to God.

And if you're here today and you are in that relationship with Christ and you have been reconciled to him, my encouragement to you is to be a minister of reconciliation. Be someone who goes into the world and calls others to join in that relationship as well.

The second thing I want us to see about the way that new creation lives differently is in verse 21. It says, For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God. Righteousness is a big word that we don't really use today, but it means having a right relationship or a right standing with God. It says that when we were sinners, when we were separated from God and alienated from him, Christ came in, even though he was perfect, and took on that separation and alienation so that we can have a new right standing and right relationship with God.

[30 : 10] God. If you are a new creation, you have a new standing and a new relationship with God. The wording of this verse is huge.

Notice it doesn't just say we have the righteousness of God. It says we become the righteousness of God. There's a big difference between having something and being something. If I want to go to China, I have to go and apply at the office and then pay lots of money and I get a China visa.

And when I have this China visa, if I accidentally forget it when I'm going to the border, they won't let me into the country. If I go into the country and I break the law, they can take away the visa.

And even if I follow all of the rules perfectly, eventually the visa expires and I have to put in more effort of applying again and paying again to get another visa. In contrast, I was born in America and I am an American.

Unless the USA ceases to be a country or they severely change their citizenship laws, I am an American. If I lose all of my identification, I can go to the American consulate and they will work with me to get me a new identification to prove that I am an American.

[31 : 26] because it's part of my identity. When you have something, it's like the China visa. It can easily be taken away. You have to put in effort to maintain it. But when something is part of your identity, it's part of who you are and it can't be taken away.

If we have the righteousness of God, we have to work. We have to try. We have to hold on to it to maintain it. But if we are the righteousness of God, then it's something that God has implanted in us as part of our new identity.

When he makes us new, that is part of our new identity. Something that can't be ripped away from us unless God ceases to exist or God changes his rules about how to get into his family, which the Bible is very clear will not happen.

And so when it says that we have become the righteousness of God, we have a new identity implanted in us. And if you have that identity, I encourage you this week to live in obedience to God and to avoid sin completely, not even to flirt with it.

Because the Bible is clear that as part of our new identity, as being in Christ, sin is fundamentally opposed to that new identity. It rips us apart from him.

[32 : 42] And if we have been reunited, sin is now opposed to our identity. Rebellion against God is now fundamentally opposed to who we are.

It's not something that we do to try and earn God's favor. It's not something we do, obedience isn't something we do to try and make God love us more. Obedience is something that we do because it's part of who we are now if we are in Christ.

And so my challenge to you, if you are new, if you are in Christ this week, be a minister of reconciliation and live as the righteousness of God, walking in obedience to him, not even coming close to sin, even though it can be so appealing and hold out so many promises to us.

Remember that if you are a new creation, sin is fundamentally opposed to your new identity. So the big question overarching, are you new?

Where are you? Are you in Christ or not? What are you? Are you a new creation? Or are you simply an old creation holding up a mask, trying to make everyone think that you're okay?

[34 : 00] And if you are a new creation, what do you do? Are you living in line with your new identity? God came to make us new.

God came not to give us the appearance of life, but to give us life and life abundantly. And as we enter into this new year, I pray that each of us would see that and experience it and live that new life that we've been given in Christ.

Or accept the new life that we've been offered in Christ, if we haven't done that yet. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your love for us. We thank you for this promise that if anyone is in Christ, we are new creations.

That it's not something that we have to earn on our own. It's not something we have to fake to keep up appearances of. But it's something that you have made objectively real in our lives.

God, I pray that we would recognize that reality. That we wouldn't be shaped by what we think of ourselves on a subjective level, but that we would remember the objective truth of the change that you have brought in our lives.

[35 : 14] I pray that if anyone's here who hasn't yet had that change, that they would see your beauty today and fall in love with you and trust in you. And I pray that each of us this week would live in line with who we are in you.

And in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.