

I have known Jesus most of my life, but He continues to surprise me regularly. Isn't amazing the way the Lord organizes and shapes the most simple details of our lives? Think about it...God knew the city I would grow up in, He knew the church I would attend, where I would go to school, who I would marry, how many kids I would have, and where He would call me to pastor.

And more than simply knowing these details, God is directing my history, your history, the history of the world. Sometimes I am arrested by the thought that God has placed me where I am because God wants me to join Him in seeing His purposes come to pass. I've been uniquely created to be a husband to Naomi and a father to Luke and Anna; there is a purpose God wants me to live out in these relationships.

God led Naomi and I to this church so that we could share our lives with you, and you with us. There are literally tens of thousands of people that could do my job, but the thing is that God called me; there are things He has put in me in order to bless you, and there are things in you that God intends to be a blessing to me and my family.

God has situated our family on the North Shore, on Hardy Crescent, and He has surrounded us with neighbours. Just yesterday, Luke and I came back from the store and three different neighbours (and their kids) had converged on our front yard. As we pulled up to our house, Luke said, "*Dad it looks like a party is going on!*"

He was right...kids were riding their bikes up and down the street, playing hockey on the road, and the parents were chatting, watching out for cars, and talking about life. It's no mistake that we live on our street...God arranged that...and our placement on Hardy Crescent

goes beyond a place to live and grass to cut. We are surrounded by people that do not know that Jesus loves them, that He wants to bless them, that the Father longs to call them daughter and son. But we know...I believe it's a big part of why we are there.

This sense of destiny and calling I've been talking about has nothing to do with being a pastor, and everything to do with being connected to Jesus. Everyone who is united to Jesus is ushered into a life of purpose, possibility, and power.

If we would just open our ears to hear what He is saying, if we would just open our eyes to see what He is doing around us yes, if we would just step out and take a risk, we might find ourselves on the edge of the miraculous. The greatest miracle of all takes place when a person gives their life to Jesus. Romans 10:14 says, "*how can they believe in [Jesus] if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?*" They can't; they won't.

You are not in your school, or your job, or in your apartment complex by random chance; you are a representative of Jesus. Don't waste your time thinking that Jesus should have sent someone better, someone more qualified; Jesus knows what He is doing, He thinks you are just right, and so do I.

Can I tell you something? The vision God has put on my heart for this church is a vision for growth. In my mind's eye I can see my neighbours and friends discovering Jesus and finding a home among us. In neighbourhoods, and campuses, and office buildings, I can see us loving, serving, and telling people how incredible Jesus is.

As I began this week, I was planning to continue in our series through Corinthians, but on Wednesday the Holy Spirit directed my attention somewhere else. As I've been saying this morning, the North Shore needs Jesus, but then, so do we. And my concern is that too many of us are missing out on our destiny and calling because we've forgotten who we are and what we have in Jesus.

So this morning, I want to talk with you about our identity; my prayer is that the Spirit would pour gas on my words and light a fire in your heart that cannot be quenched.

Illus: Have you ever forgotten who you are? Some do, we call it amnesia, and it's often triggered by some kind of trauma; I can attest to it firsthand.

A little over nine years ago my son Luke was born, and like every other parent of newborn children, my sleeping patterns were severely interrupted. Did you know that sleep deprivation is commonly used as a form of torture? If you've every had small kids, you know all about it.

I've always been a guy who needs 9-10 hours a night; I can live on 7 hours a night for a week, but if I go too much longer I end up getting a little loopy. When I say loopy, what I mean is that I start bumping into things, I begin to forget things...basically, I become a much dumber version of myself.

About 8 weeks after Luke was born, I was at an all-time low when it came to sleep; 8 weeks into fatherhood, I'm not sure I've ever been dumber in my life. Right around week 8, I was invited to come and play soccer with a bunch of guys from the church...when I think

about it now, I'm not sure it was very smart to put on a pair of shoes with sharp cleats on the bottom and then attempt to run at full speed and kick a bouncing ball surrounded by a couple dozen other people...but that's exactly my point, I wasn't thinking clearly at all.

Before we started playing, we were all sitting on the grass putting on our cleats...the sun was shining, the grass was warm, and I was thinking about how good it would feel to lay down and have a nap. But I noticed around the circle that there were a few guys that I had never met before, so I stumbled to my feet and made my way over to introduce myself. I approached one of the new guys with a smile on my face, and my hand extended...*Hi*, I said, *my name is Mike*.

Everyone around me doubled over in laughter before I caught my mistake. *Actually, I'm pretty sure my name is Mark*. Sometimes we forget who we are.

As followers of Jesus, nothing is more important than keeping our eyes fixed on Him: we lose our way when we lose sight of His way, we forget who we are when we forget who He is, we stumble, we falter, when other voices become louder than His voice.

Hebrews 12:1-3 says, "*let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith...Consider him...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*"

How many of us have grown weary and are losing heart because we have lost sight of Jesus? Jesus is our reference point for all of life; apart from Him our lives are pushed and pulled like a boat without a rudder. Sometimes we get so tired, so beat up, that we forget who we

are. But long before we forget who we are, we have forgotten who He is, who He promises to be for us.

I've been thinking all week about our identity in Christ (who He is and what we are because of Him); in the next year I'd like to spend some time teaching and writing about this subject. But this morning, I'd like to call attention to one aspect of our identity: *in Christ, we are forgiven and free.*

Jesus once said that "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;*" He was talking about the evil one, the devil.¹ Jesus came for a different purpose: to invite people into a full, vibrant, and abundant life. The evil one is constantly trying to steal our inheritance, kill our freedom, and destroy our identity; all too often he is successful.

The Bible tells us that if we are in Christ, we are forgiven, but if the evil one can get us to think that we are not...then he's got us right where he wants us: duped, depressed, and out of commission. Now apart from believing that God doesn't love you, there is nothing so sinister and destructive to life in Christ as willingly walking around with the weight of shame and guilt. Like a bag of cement hanging around our necks, shame and guilt prevent us from lifting our eyes to see Jesus and all He has for us.

And here's the thing, if we are in Christ we don't have to bear the weight of guilt and shame. It's time to lift up our heads church! If

you have your Bibles with you, let me encourage you to turn with me to 1 John 2:1-2.

In this letter, the Apostle John writes to a group of people he knew well. John's desire is to encourage them towards deep fellowship with the life of God; what John envisions is a life of receiving forgiveness, freedom, and love of God. Allow me to read these two verses for us.

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

"Atonement" is a peculiar word; I suspect it's unfamiliar to most tongues. These verses present us with a cosmic problem, our sin has separated us from God. If it helps, think about this word *atonement* in the following way: at-one-ment. In and through Jesus, what was once separated can now be made one.

How does it all work? Jesus became all that we are, that we might receive all that is His. In theological terms, this idea stems from a theory of the atonement known as "recapitulation". The idea being that Jesus fully identified with us in our humanity; while being fully God, Jesus became fully man. But more, the sin of the world was supernaturally imparted to Jesus, the Righteous One, and in turn, His right standing before God is imparted to any and all who give their

¹ John 10:10. Unless otherwise noted, every Scripture reference has been taken from the New International Version (2011).

lives to Him.² Jesus became all that we are, that we might receive all that is His: life, forgiveness, the love of the Father, freedom, oneness with God, etc.

Depending on the translation of the Bible you're reading, your text might read: "*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*" *Propitiation* is an even stranger word than *atonement*; the next time you play Scrabble try busting out these words and you'll score big.

Propitiation is a word that communicates what was happening on the cross when Jesus died: Jesus died bearing the full weight of the world's sin, as well as the full weight of the Father's judgement against sin. What this means is that all sin, past, present, and future was fully judged, punished, and put to death through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So let's see if we've all got it:

- Whose sin did Jesus bear on the cross? Mine, yours, the world's.
- Did God hold anything back when His judgement fell on Jesus? No...Jesus bore the full weight of judgement.
- So...how much judgement is left for those who are in Christ? None.

This is the point at which many people falter. Many of us have staked our lives on the grace of God, but not entirely. We tell ourselves that

Jesus has paid for our sins, but that it is good to carry around guilt and shame so that we are appropriately thankful (and miserable) for what Jesus had to endure. Secretly we wonder if God isn't angry with us after all.

God isn't like that; when Jesus cried "*It is finished!*" He meant it. Psalm 103:8-12 says, "*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love...he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*"

Romans 8:1-2 says, "*there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. 2 And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.*"³

1 John 4:18 says, "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*"

So much of the shame that we experience has nothing to do with God. Our enemy, the devil, is constantly trying to remind us of the things God has already forgiven. He is trying to steal our inheritance, kill our freedom, and destroy our identity but he can't if we don't fall for his lies.

² 2 Corinthians 5:21.

³ New Living Translation.

What God has forgiven, He has forgiven. The punishment, the shame and the guilt for our sin has already fallen upon Jesus; our debt has been paid in full. Lugging around a burden of shame and guilt is unnecessary, and can I be so bold as to say that it's beyond unnecessary...it's dumb.

Believing his lies allows him to steal our inheritance, kill our freedom, and destroy our identity. Whenever we feel shame for something in our forgiven past, we need to actively redirect our shame to the shadow of the Cross...that's where it belongs.

Now, not all guilt is illegitimate; when we walk in opposition to God, the Holy Spirit convicts us. His reminder is meant to turn our attention back to Jesus, and what He won for us at the cross. When we become aware of unconfessed sin, we confess it; 1 John 1:9 says "*He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins*".

The gift of God's forgiveness is for you, bought and paid in full by Jesus. I hope you know that Jesus not only offers us forgiveness; His desire is that we would walk in freedom as well. But all too often, forgiveness falls short of freedom, because we never get past confession to repentance.

Repentance:

Confession is crucial; confession unlocks the forgiveness Jesus paid for. But confession and forgiveness don't always lead to lasting freedom; sometimes confession only deals with the surface layer of our guilt and shame.

Repentance is not the same thing as sorrow or contrition. Being "sorry" is fine, but sorrow, even godly sorrow, doesn't lead to freedom.

Neither is repentance the promise we make to Jesus (and others) that we will "never do it again. How many times have we made the following promises:

- *Jesus, I promise I won't fall back into addiction...that's the last time I'm ever getting drunk, or high...*
- *Jesus, I promise I won't keep spending money I don't have and get further into debt.*
- *Jesus, I promise I won't look at pornography, or, I promise I won't have sex outside of marriage...this was the last time...it will never happen again.*
- *Jesus, I promise I won't try to control everyone and everything around me.*
- *Jesus, I promise I won't live in fear, anxious and worried about everything.*

I have found that no matter how sincere my promises, sincere promises rarely lead to lasting freedom.

What we need is repentance; we don't need more promises, we need new thoughts and desires. Confession deals with the "what": *Jesus, forgive me for what I've done*. Repentance deals with the root cause: *Jesus, what is driving my desires/behaviours?*

The plain and simple truth is that a angry man **is** going to act out in anger. A hungry woman **is** going to look for ways to satisfy her hunger. A fearful person **is** going to hide, or try to control everything around them, to keep themselves safe.

Repentance goes beyond confession, inviting Jesus into our anger, into our hunger, into our fear. The word “repent” is an action word, it means to change one’s thinking, or desiring, so as to shift direction and behaviour.

Confession is relatively easy, compared with repentance. Repentance is the hard work of inviting the Holy Spirit to reveal what lies within us. Repentance is the hard work of inviting the Spirit to hold a mirror in front of us, but we rest in the fact that God already sees us are we are and there is nothing in us that could ever make God love us any less...He cannot love us any more than He already does.

So what might confession and repentance look like?

Jesus I confess that I am an angry person, but feeling sorry about being angry hasn't got me anywhere. Uncover the reasons for my anger; expose my hurts, disappointments, and fears. Jesus, change the way I think, what I prioritize, and the things I desire so that I can walk in freedom from anger.

Jesus I confess that my life is driven by my hunger...the pursuit of satisfaction has led me into all kinds of pain. Jesus, I want to go beyond confession to repentance. Expose my hunger for recognition, for significance, for relationship...expose and redirect the way I think and feel...only You can satisfy the deepest longings of my heart.

Jesus I confess that I live much of my life in fear...it drives me to hide, it drives me to control. Jesus, I repent...I need You to change me...to change the way I think and perceive. You are greater, stronger, and more solid than anything I fear...come and be my strong tower, my safe place, my refuge in fearful places.

Friends, confession unlocks forgiveness but repentance unlocks freedom.

Relief from guilt and shame is fantastic! The Bible says that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins; He bore the sin of the entire world, and He put it to death on the cross. If we are in Christ, we don't have labour under guilt and shame: all that we've done wrong, all that we will ever do wrong has already been paid for.

Do you want relief from guilt and shame? Then turn to Jesus and take Him at His word. Do not confuse what you “feel” with what is “fact”. You may not *feel* forgiven but the *fact* is that our sin has been paid for, our debt has been erased, and though our sins were like scarlet, we have been washed white as snow. Who are we? *In Christ, we are the forgiven!*

Confession unlocks forgiveness, but repentance unlocks freedom. Relief from guilt and shame is fantastic, but why be satisfied with relief when we can have freedom. Why settle for relief when Jesus can make us new.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “*if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*” If we are in Christ, God has started something new in you...He's not finished with us yet, none of have been made complete, but our lives are under construction. Jesus is the Master Carpenter, and we can rest assured that what He is making of us will be amazing.

In Christ, we are loved, are forgiven and free, we are complete; in Christ we are people of destiny, purpose, and mission. In Christ,

we've got hope in this life and glory that awaits us in the life to come.

Because of Christ we are sons and daughters of the Great King, we are new creations, and we are destined to reign with Him through out eternity. This is who we are in Christ.

Neither our regrets, disappointments, failures, or sin has the last word on who we are...our identity is wrapped up in Christ...what He thinks of us is more true than any other thing that could be said. Jesus became all that we are, that we might receive all that is His. Praise be to God!

Pray

Worship