

The Self-Identity of Jesus Christ
(Selected texts) - December 20, 2009
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We are entering a new sermon series which seeks to explore how being united with Christ can influence our self-identity. Our self-identity is how we see our self; Who we believe we are. Since the Self-identity of Jesus Christ could cover a huge area, we are going to zero in on one primary aspect: How Jesus' self-identity revealed itself emotionally, and in turn, we will compare our own self-identity and see if there is a difference. If there is a difference, and of course there is, we will look at how inaccurate views of our self affect the quality of our lives and our discipleship. Spiritual maturity rests on an accurate, truthful assessment of who we are according to God's Word instead of resting on corrupted memories and twisted beliefs about ourselves.

I. We struggle with our self-identity, did Jesus?

It is fitting that we launch this study the Sunday before Christmas because Jesus Christ is the key to unlocking who we are meant to become as the result of his coming to earth as our Savior. In understanding His self-Identity, I believe we can come to understand our own new identity. The Word of God instructs us that we are spiritually united to Christ through his work of rescuing us from the brokenness sin produces. This relationship means "**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**" (2 Cor. 5:17). Among other changes within us, this points to a new identity in Christ.

Why do we need a new identity in the first place? To answer that question, we need to go back in time to the beginning. Humanity is the result of God's direct creation. The first human beings were a male and a female named Adam & Eve: "**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them**" (Gen. 1:27). They were perfect in every way: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They were created to represent God and to care for His creation. Their self-identity was healthy, untainted by any sin.

However, an Adversary existed who tempted the first couple, leading them to willfully choose to disobey God. The instant they sinned, moral, spiritual, emotional, and physical brokenness took over and their self-identities were corrupted. Humanity has not been the same since.

From that day to this, we all live in an environment under the control of our evil adversary. Satan seeks to rule over and destroy God's creation. His twisted ways have produced decay and death in every living thing. Humanity, God's highest creation, was hit the hardest. This corruption has spread into every facet of life; Nothing has been spared. Not even the way we see our self as a person. We have passed this corruption on from generation to generation.

There is a distinct difference, however, in the birth of Jesus. I believe the miraculous conception of Jesus within Mary was an act of God which, for this one instance, broke the chain of corruption. Jesus was born free from the bondage to sin that affects everyone. As God come in the flesh, Jesus knew no sin....ever. The author of Hebrews writes that Jesus "**has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin**" (He. 4:15b). Being sinless he was the perfect person to bear our punishment and to set us free from sin and guilt.

Did Jesus know who he was? In his self-identity did Jesus see himself as the son of Joseph the carpenter

or as the Son of God, the Messiah? The answer is “Yes” and Yes!” I believe he knew about his divine-human origin. Can’t you see Mary snuggling the little boy Jesus on her lap as she told him the story about the Angel of Gabriel, his message of her giving birth to the Messiah, the journey to Bethlehem, the angels singing, and his birth in a cattle stall.

When Jesus began his ministry at the age of 29 or 30, he was baptized by John the Baptist. As he came up out of the water Jesus heard a voice from heaven: **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”** (Matt. 3:17). At the last supper Jesus washes his disciples’ feet as he gave them an example of servanthood. John describes it like this: **“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ...”** (John 13:3). Jesus knew he had all authority and that his origin was not earthly but heavenly and that he would soon return to the Father and to the glory he possessed before coming to earth. Jesus was secure in his self-identity. He knew exactly who he was and what he was here to do and what would happen to him afterwards.

II. We all carry around emotional baggage that causes us pain, did Jesus?

Not only was Jesus sinless and clearly knew who he was, but I believe the Bible presents him as the sanest person, the most emotionally healthy person, the most well adjusted person, who has ever walked this earth. Let’s see if this holds up:

1. Was Jesus an approval addict? Just as some people crave food, alcohol, gambling, even work, others crave the approval of others. Their need for acceptance and their fear of rejection is so strong that they cannot stand the thought of someone not liking them. This leads them to be “people pleasers”. Instead of doing what is right for themselves, they do, or say, or believe, or become whatever they think will please someone who’s approval they crave. Such a person can not live their own life because they are too busy living the way they think everyone else wants them to live.

Do we see any evidence of that emotionally unhealthy behavior in Jesus? No! If there was, we’d see Jesus trying to impress the religious leaders of the day. He would have given in to their points of view and he would have denied who he was knowing that to claim to be the Christ would be his death sentence. Jesus loved people but he wasn’t molded by their expectations or their demands. He was secure in himself. More importantly, even if all would forsake him, he still knew that he was loved by his Heavenly Father. Jesus prayed, **“I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them”** (John 17:26). It is an amazing thing to know down deep that you are loved by God...even if you are forsaken by family or friends. Jesus did not hunger for man’s approval because he was already approved and loved by the Father.

2. Was Jesus afraid of failure? Fear is a powerful emotion. It can be based on reality. Walking into the swirling winds of a tornado is a really bad idea and may result in you never returning to “Kansas” ever again. So fearing tornadic winds is wise. Fear can also be based on falsehood, lies, and wrong perceptions. Once a coach told Michael Jordan that he would never amount to anything as a basketball player. If Michael had believed him and allowed that false statement to grow into a fear of even trying, Michael Jordan would not be the legend he is today, plus he wouldn’t have all those fancy basketball shoes! The fear of failure can paralyze a person causing them to withdraw from any risk that just might lead to failure.

Did Jesus give any hints of being driven and controlled by fear? No! He walked on water during a

raging storm! He took a whip and drove the crooks out of the temple! He did not cower at the threats made against him. He stood before Pilate as quiet as a lamb before the slaughter knowing that his death was necessary for our salvation. He never worried, became hopeless & He never gave up. The only thing that drove Him was his passion to do the will of His Heavenly Father.

3. Is there any evidence that Jesus was filled with shame? Shame is a powerful emotion that leads a person to believe that their life is a mistake, that they are worthless, that they have nothing to offer because in their own minds they are nothing. Jesus could have felt that way, after all, look where he was born. In a cave used as a barn. His bassinet was a feed trough. His parents were poor. He did not grow up in a privileged household. He worked with his hands because he held no high positions in politics or religion. He had no degrees or pedigrees! Neither did he live in Jerusalem where the Temple was, rather he grew up in Galilee, which is like growing up in the boondocks.

But we see no shame toward his family, or his home town, nor his lack of status. He was absolutely O.K. about being who he was because he knew that he was the beloved Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the World. Jesus' self-Identity was strong, healthy, and free from any influence of sin or human brokenness.

III. Is there a hopeful connection between Jesus' self-identity and our own?

So how does Christ's perfect self-identity have any bearing on our own? Here is where I find it gets interesting. Jesus promised his disciples that: ***I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live you also will live. In that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you***" (Jo.14:18-20). When we trust our lives to Him, He comes to live within us through the Holy Spirit. He lives within us to enable us to experience life abundantly and to be transformed into His likeness. Sounds good doesn't it.

There is a problem, however, that may bother you, as it does me. We are told to expect one thing...the indwelling Christ with all that he has to offer...but we tend to experience something quite different. We find ourselves being hindered by long standing thought patterns, destructive beliefs about ourselves, negative attitudes, life controlling emotions, shame, guilt, perfectionism, seeking the approval of others, trying to earn our way into acceptance through our performances, on and on it goes. Granted, some have less baggage than others; However, everyone has some baggage that is detrimental to inner peace and contentment, self acceptance, and a healthy self-esteem. Living in this world has corrupted our self-identity. But don't we have the promise of Scripture which says: ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*** (2 Cor. 5:17). If this is true, and with Jesus living within us, why isn't our self-Identity more whole and complete than it is? Why hasn't it been radically and instantly changed?

What if the Self-Identity of Christ is somehow available to us, what would that mean? How would that change the way we experience life? What do we have to do to discover our new, true identity in Christ. How then do we release it to fill our lives with greater freedom, joy, and satisfaction? These are the questions we want to explore in the messages to come because I believe that as followers of Christ we are meant to be set free from the damages of sin to our self-identity. I believe we'll find hope and healing in the messages to come.

