

John 1:11-13  
The Power of Jesus  
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The most viral video ad in the history of the planet was released last year; maybe some of you saw it. It was an advertisement for soap, but it wasn't about soap, it was more about identity. It featured an open, expansive, sun-soaked loft apartment somewhere, with a man behind an easel. He is an FBI forensic sketch artist, and behind his back is a thin curtain, and behind the curtain is a woman who had her back to the man. They had never met one another, but the woman was asked to describe her face to the artist. He would give her prompts, like "describe your chin" and anxiously the woman would describe her features. Many women took turns sitting behind that curtain. And what we see is these women would negatively describe their features, like "I have a protruding chin."

Then the subjects would leave and another person would come and describe the same woman as the artist drew a second sketch. When he is done, they pull the curtain aside and they present the images to one another side by side to the subject and ask them which one they like better, and this is when the tears start to flow, because in every instance, what we find is, that these women find themselves less beautiful to themselves than other people do.

This ad was viewed by 110 million people in the first month alone. It was translated and shown in 25 different languages around the world. What was it about this ad that really touched a nerve with so many people? Well, the New York Times ran a story about this phenomenon, in which they interviewed a female ad exec, who said that she thinks women undervalue themselves. This ad invites us to stop and think about how we think of ourselves. So this morning, I want to invite you to stop and think, how do you view yourself? How do you answer the question, who am I?

It's not an easy question to answer, but I put it in front of us this morning because I think Jesus Christ offers us the ability to really know who you are. That's the power of Jesus, the ability to know who you really are. He helps us to understand whether we come to that identity by our own grunt efforts, or do we come to that understanding by means of grace? Do we have a grace identity?

If you would, reach for a copy of Scripture, either the one we've made available to you in the pew racks or the one you brought with you, and turn with me to John chapter 1 verses 11-13. And out of reverence and respect for the authority of God's word, if you are able, would you please stand with me as I read John 1:11-13.

**He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

What I hope you noticed as I read these verses today is what it says in verse 12: power to become. Jesus gives power to become somebody. This is what our culture desperately wants. We want to become somebody who is somebody to somebody, we want to become somebody people admire, we want to become somebody who matters, we want our lives to mean something. That's our destiny, and I believe that's what Jesus gives us the power to become.

So when I talk about the power of Jesus, what I'd like to convince you of is that Jesus alone gives us the power to become somebody. To do that, I want to tell you a story about something that happened to me. A while back, Amy and I were invited to a dinner that was being hosted by White's. It was down at the Honeywell, and what I quickly realized when I walked in the door was that I knew very few people in the room, and all of a sudden my social anxieties began to crop up. It was the high school lunch room all over again. So what I do in a situation like that is I look for someone in the room who appeared to be normal and hopefully nice and I went and sat at their table. My problem in situations like that is I quickly begin to think that everybody around me has a really cool job.

So here I am, and I sit down with this guy and his wife, and within 5 minutes my fear is realized: the conversation turns to job and I ask what it is he does. "I'm a state representative down in Indianapolis." Great, now I'm totally insecure.

Now, let me just say that I love my job, and it is my great honor to be your pastor, but one of the occupational hazards for me is thinking that other people's lives are more put together, more glamorous, more exciting.

One of the dangers in my life is thinking that other people have more important jobs, and let me say that if your identity hangs on your career or your family or whatever, then you have a very fragile identity, because all of those things are inherently flawed, broken, infected with this sin virus that infects us all. There is always going to be someone who has a more glamorous life. But what if the meaning and value of your life didn't depend on what you do, but what has been done for you?

That's the story. Now I want to tie it in with an analogy. Hang with me because I think it will make sense in a moment. We have watched and prayed as Ebola has terrorized west Africa. And they are now using an experimental therapy that we're familiar with, blood transfusions. The idea is that there are a small percentage of Ebola patients who will survive, and they will overcome the disease because something was at work inside them. And so if you take the blood of those who have overcome the disease and transfuse it with the blood of sick people, the hope is that the properties of the victorious blood will overtake the blood circulating in the patient so that that person would also be victorious.

What if that's what John is saying here when he says that Jesus gives us the power to become Children of God? What if God in heaven looks at his creation and sees that humanity has a virus that is universal and it has 100% mortality rate, in everyone it leads to death. And the problem with that is "I love these creatures, I created man and woman

to be my sons and daughters and I gave them the universe to become a home for them to live with them as a family. Now I watch as one by one, each of them manifests the symptoms of this sin virus, they turn away from me, and one day they will perish.”

God, here in the presence of the Holy Spirit, speaking to the Son says, “What could we do about this problem?” That’s when the Son of God raises his hand and says, “What if, what if there could be just one person, one human being who lives like a child of God, who is infected with the virus, yet at every point resists being overcome with the virus? So that by the end, we have a healthy human genome that can be inserted into the lives of humanity?” So the Son says, “Send me, send me to earth that I as the child of God, could make humanity the children of God.”

I think it might work. That’s what Christmas is all about. You couldn’t become a child of God unless Jesus gives us the power to do so.

So how does that impact our identity? Remember, that ad executive says that most people, not just women, but most people undervalue themselves. How do you value yourself? Is your identity built upon what you can do and make and produce for yourself and your family? Because our culture will tell you if you want to be somebody, you have to do something. And the problem is that you can never do enough or have enough to be the person you need to be.

Let me give you an example of how this plays out, and it’s a matter of syntax. Do you notice that there is a new way of speaking these days where a person who says, “I don’t want to be the guy who…” I don’t want to be the guy who gets lost. In our culture we don’t disassociate what we do from who we are. So if you get lost, you’re no longer just lost, you’re the guy who gets lost. You see how important this is. Now what we do gets intertwined with our identity. That’s an example of how we fixate on trying to manufacture our identity.

What are things in Wabash that we allow ourselves to be drawn into in order to manufacture our identity?

Now let’s talk about the alternative, let’s talk about a grace identity, the identity that we receive as a gift whether we deserve it or not. It’s very stable; it’s very robust. John offers us the back story to Jesus in his gospel in the first 18 verses, we call it the prologue. The other gospels give a history, but they begin with the birth story. John takes us further back. John begins before he was born as the Son of God, for all eternity past. This appears in verse 12 and in verse 18 when it says that Jesus is the Son of God, not begotten, not made. This is a grace identity, because, notice, it doesn’t come at the end of Jesus’ ministry, it comes at the beginning.

Remember that scene at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry when John the Baptist will baptize Jesus? Notice how the Holy Spirit descends upon him like a dove and the clouds open and the voice of God speaks and says, “You are my son, beloved son with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1) Notice Jesus hasn’t done a thing, Jesus hasn’t done anything to

deserve it yet, but God says to him, “I want you to have an identity before any of the other messages enter in and begin to crowd out the others. I want you to know that I love you before you begin to hear those other messages.”

But we can go even further back with this, back to the Old Testament, with God’s people Israel. We go back to one of the most beloved psalms at this time of year, Psalm 2, a psalm that talks about identity, and being known and loved before you can do anything to deserve it.

Psalm 2 says the nations plot, they conspire against you, kings and rulers take council together against you, against the Lord’s anointed. And what does the Psalm say about all the messages, all the derision that comes against God’s people? The Psalmist says that God laughs from on high, literally the heavens laugh at all the world tries to tell us that contradicts God’s first and final message about our lives.

This is a very powerful message for us to remember, and it continues to speak and form us throughout our lives. For our students and teenagers, if you’re dating a boy or girl who is putting pressure on you to do more physically than you’re comfortable with, you can know that your identity is not based on your body. You can say in this situation, “I am a child of God.” For those of us in the early years of our careers where you might be tempted to cut corners to get ahead, or sacrifice precious time with your family in order to get that promotion, you can say, “God’s power and provision have given me the gifts I need to provide for the material and the emotional needs of my family, and God will continue to do so.” For those of you who have retired and are now at an age and stage of your life when you’re reflective, perhaps looking back at opportunities seized and opportunities lost, remember Jesus’ identity wasn’t conferred upon him as the Son of God after he proved his worth by raising from the dead. Remember that it was at the beginning that God said, “You are my son, the beloved.” So if you are struggling because things didn’t turn out the way you hoped, remember your identity isn’t earned; it’s something that comes because God loves you with such incomparable grace that he gives it to you first.

This is the power of a grace identity, and in verses 11-13, God gives authority to his people to take hold of this identity. And it’s not something that we just muster up enough spiritual energy to do. It’s something that God gives us power, or as it is sometimes translated, authority to take hold of. So let’s go back to that sun-drenched apartment from the beginning, and imagine you are in the seat, and your life is being sketched. When the sketch artist asks you to describe your life, are you going to talk about what you do, or are you going to describe what Jesus has done. In our spiritual and physical bankruptcy, Jesus gives us the credit card and says, “Even though you don’t have anything in your account, because my name is on the card, you have all that you need. You have all the meaning, all the value, all the power that you will ever need, and I am authorizing you to draw on my name.” Jesus has authorized and delegated you to draw upon all of the things he possesses for yourself, and if you were to draw back that curtain and see the sketch, you would see yourself for the very first time, the way you were meant to be seen the way God sees you, a perfect beloved child.