

2 - Matthew 3:13–4:6, “The Attack on Identity” // *The Unseen Enemy* // November 2023¹

Announcement

Well, Summit, I have good news to start off with--when it was all said and done, we had a total of **367 baptisms** over the past **3 weeks**. That’s close to 400 in a single month--praise God for that! And **you can’t convince me that’s not, at least in part, the result of our 24 hours of prayer** that preceded the month. One thing that is consistent: whenever and wherever God moves, a prayer awakening precedes it. So I want you to press in on this--who are you praying for personally to become a follower of Jesus? Don’t let up.

And I would be **remiss not to acknowledge that it’s Veterans Day Weekend** here in the United States. We are so grateful for you men and women that so boldly and selflessly put yourself into harms’ way to offer justice and protection. So, if you are current military or a veteran at any of our campuses, would you stand so we can express our appreciation for you?

¹ Works Consulted: *Spiritual Warfare*, Karl Payne; Craig Groeschel, “Spiritual Warfare,” sermon preached at LifeChurch, 2012. And others as noted throughout.

Introduction

Speaking of veterans, one of my favorite all-time books is Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*. (It’s a military classic still required reading for certain Marine programs and Navy Seals). I’m always too embarrassed to put it on my top-10 list because it seems so un-Pastoral, but it’s a series of principles for leading people and building movements. Principle 18 says: for any hope of success in battle, you have to know your enemy and know yourself. I quote:

“For if you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”

“If you know yourself but not the enemy, then for every victory gained you will suffer a defeat.”

“If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”

That is what today’s message is about. **Knowing your enemy and knowing yourself**, and how those 2 things relate. Last week we talked about the unseen enemy the Bible alerts us to, how he quietly and subtly hurls flaming darts into our consciousness and how he seeks to “occupy” different rooms in the houses of our lives. (Luke 11)

Today, I want to build on that and talk about what might be our Enemy’s most subtle, most undetected, and yet most effective

strategy in destroying us. It's invisible--most of us never recognize this as his work. And that's all by design. To quote **Kevin Spacey** in *The Usual Suspects*,² "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist." (Advice that **Kevin Spacey** probably should have paid closer attention to himself.)

So **Matthew 3**, if you have your Bibles...

The question of **IDENTITY** is one of the most important questions for this generation.

- What makes you, you?
- What gives you worth and value?
- **WHO. ARE. YOU?**

I want you to consider this for a minute:

- **91% of teenagers in our country report significant psychological symptoms due to stress and anxiety**
- **Less than 1/2 of high school students (45%) describe their mental health as "very good"**
- **In the last 15 years, the percentage of young adult females who say they are "persistently sad and hopeless" has grown from 10% to 57%³**
- **Suicide rates of young adults have increased by 30% in last decade;⁴ and since 1950 they have quadrupled**

² Spacey plays the character "Roger 'Verbal' Kint

³For guys, now 29% <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/factsheets/healthy-youth/sadness-and-violence-among-teen-girls-and-LGBQ-youth-factsheet.html>

And don't think being raised in a Christian home or being financially well off automatically fixes everything. In fact,

- **Girls that go to private schools are 4x more likely to have anxiety disorders than girls in public schools; for boys, it is 3x more likely**

Now, there's a lot of factors behind these (I'm not trying to reduce it down to one cause), but I would say that it's in part because this generation suffers from a massive identity crisis. **IDENTITY**: How you see yourself; who you really are; why you think you have value.

This generation suffers from a massive identity crisis, and that's in part because they have to deal with forces no other generation has ever had to deal with.

- **The ubiquity** of things like **Instagram** and **Snapchat** and **TikTok** and **BeReal** that remind you, **24/7**, of all you're missing out on and all the ways you don't measure up; and, of course, forcing you to compare your life to the filtered, sculpted version of everyone else's life you see on SOCIAL MEDIA.
- You're comparing your "real" life to everyone else's highlight reel
 - *I take my wife out for a **nice meal** on her birthday and buy her a **new, expensive pair of shoes**, and I am feeling **pretty good about that**, until I notice on Instagram the wife of a pastor buddy of mine posts that for her birthday, he bought her a pony and took her backpacking across Europe.*

⁴ I.e. among all ages, between 2000–16

- *And suddenly dinner and shoes don't seem that awesome anymore.*
- **Comparing ourselves among ourselves** has always been a problem, but now that is in your face 24/7

So, again, I say: the question of IDENTITY is one of the most important questions for this generation.

- What makes you, you?
- What gives you worth and value?
- **WHO. ARE. YOU?**

The **question of identity** is the **question quietly at work** in the Great Temptation recorded in MATTHEW 3—4. It's the temptation behind the other temptations; the temptation that makes the others so effective.

In my **ESV Study Bible**, the editors start the story of the Temptation in vs 1 of chapter 4. That's where you find the heading, "The Temptation of Jesus." But the story of the Temptation **actually STARTS back in vs 13** of chapter 3. (Remember: chapter headings were added later by editors to help us find our place when we were reading. Originally, this all flowed as one piece.)

So, let's start in vs 13 and I'll show you how the last 5 verses of chapter 3 set up the Great Temptation in chapter 4: "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to John, to be baptized by him. [14] John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (This was a baptism of repentance, and Jesus didn't need it, so John objected) [15] But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all

righteousness." Then John consented. [16] And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, "**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.**" (There's the Father declaring Jesus' identity. "YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON, in whom I am well pleased.")

Now, watch this... 4:1: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil... 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "**IF you are the Son of God**, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

- Excuse me? IF? "If you are the Son of God..." Isn't that exactly what the Father had JUST said about Jesus? "You are my beloved Son..."
 - **(Do you see how that CONNECTS?)**
- Satan is challenging Jesus to **do something to prove he is** what God has just declared him to be. He's attempting to inject doubt into how Jesus believes the Father feels about him. He says, "If you actually are who God says you are, Jesus, you have to prove it by doing this."

The same thing is at work in the 2nd temptation: [5] Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple [6] and said to him, (AGAIN!) "**IF you are the Son of God**, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" (In this one, Satan even twists Scripture in his attack on Jesus' identity. If you really are the Son of God, Jesus, this or that will be true of your life. He wouldn't let you get hurt, so you can throw yourself off of here"

In the **THIRD temptation**, Satan doesn't repeat the phrase "If you are the Son of God," but this one is ALL ABOUT IDENTITY, too. Satan takes Jesus high up on the Temple Mount and says, "I will give you all this if you'll worship me."

- He's offering to give Jesus something God had already promised to give him.
- Satan is saying, 'You say you are the Son of God, but you don't have all the power and privilege that should go with that title. I can give you that power and privilege RIGHT NOW!'

IT IS EXTREMELY SIGNIFICANT that in the one place in the Gospels we see Jesus and Satan do battle directly, the focal point is on identity.

- I say remarkable, because if I were to say to the average movie producer, "OK, the Son of God, the ultimate force for good in the universe, and Satan, the chief force for evil, are going to do battle," how would they depict it? Most would set up some epic MARVEL battle in a city where they are shooting lightning bolts and hurling buildings at each other.
- But here, the only time in the Gospels Jesus and Satan do battle face to face, it's **just 2 guys** out in the woods having a conversation about how Jesus sees himself.

It's like we saw last week... At the root of so many of Satan's temptations is the question of who you are and how God feels about you.

- The rest of the temptations are secondary. Satan wasn't out in the wilderness showing Jesus pictures of naked women or offering him drugs.

- Satan STARTS by making Jesus question who he is and how God feels about him.

And **you'd better believe that's where he starts** with you, and parents, where he starts with your kids. These are the first fiery darts he hurls into our consciousness.

Let me break down his attack on our identity into 4 categories. I call them "**Satan's 4 Snares**," and most of them you can see right here in this story:

1. The Snare of CIRCUMSTANCES

The subtext behind a couple of these temptations is that "If God really loved you, Jesus, your life would be different." *"If God really loved you, you could throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple and he'd protect you... or you'd be able to make these stones bread."* Satan wants to take the focus off of what God has just declared over him at his baptism and put it onto what is going on in his life.

This is what he does with us: "If God really loves you would he let this happen?"

- **It's Joseph**, betrayed by his brothers, falsely accused, sitting in prison, when Satan whispers, "Does this feel like love? Like God is for you?"
- **Or Eve in the Garden of Eden**, when Satan whispers, "Why would God tell you to not eat from this tree? He's obviously trying to hold back something good from you."

- **Or David, on the run from Saul**, hiding in caves, when Satan whispers, “Are you really a man after God’s own heart? Then why are you out here in the wilderness why that villain Saul sits comfortably on the throne?”
- It’s **Jesus’ disciples wondering why**, if he really is the Messiah, Roman soldiers still abuse and oppress God’s people with impunity.

One of the **most consistent things you’ll find in the Bible** is God’s children wondering why, if he loves them, things are the way they are.

- It’s the faithful, believing wife taking the pregnancy test and having it come up negative AGAIN; or the aging single Christian who has done her best to do things God’s way but still not married; it’s the faithful man who’s led his marriage the right way and yet his wife cheated on him and left him.
- And Satan whispers, “If you really were a son or daughter of God, and God really cared about you, he wouldn’t let this happen.”

How did Jesus respond to this? **“You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”** In other words, you **don’t bring God’s character** into question by creating tests for him that require him to prove himself beyond what he already has. Hasn’t he died on the cross? Hasn’t he risen from the dead on our behalf? **God’s word is true** and his **character is unchanging** even when I don’t understand all that he’s doing.

You will have a choice in your life--and maybe you are in one right now--as to whether you will determine God’s character by what’s going on around you or on what he declares about himself in his word and reveals about himself at the cross.

Some of you may know Mike Calhoun at our church. He runs our internship and apprentice program. I don’t know if you know this, but Mike was very influential in my life back when I was a college student. He was one of the directors of Word of Life Bible Institute, the first college I went to. In his office you’ll find a picture of Mike with his arms around a beautiful college-aged girl. It’s his daughter Misty, who was tragically killed in a car wreck when she was only 24. Mike said that when it happened it was like this dark cloud descended over his and Betsi’s (his wife’s) life. A pain and desolation and confusion that very few of us can really understand. And Mike said one night, as he walked alone, everything in him in turmoil, questioning everything, he resolved, through his tears: **“Everything in my world has fallen apart, but everything I know about God is still true!”** I may not understand anything of the how and why, but Jesus hasn’t changed. He’s the same yesterday, today and forever. The promises are all true; the tomb is still empty. God is still on the throne.

Don’t tempt the Lord your God. God is who he is, his word stands secure, and his promise never fails.

But it’s the first and maybe most consistent thing Satan throws at you. It’s the snare of circumstances... if God loved you, this or that would be different.

2. The Snare of COMPARISON:

Satan urges Jesus, “You say you are the Son of God, but are you worthy of that title? Can you turn these stones into bread? Does the

WORLD acknowledge you as worthy?" God's word on your identity is not enough; you need to prove it.

This is one of Satan's biggest traps for us: He will quietly attempt to get you to establish your worth, your value, by what you can do and, specifically, how you measure up to others:

- ***Are you as SMART as he is?***
- ***Are you as PRETTY as she is?***
- What **kind of RECOGNITION** is he getting?
- How much **MONEY** does she make? I mean, you all graduated about the same time--how do you compare?
- How are HER kids doing? How does my family compare to hers?
 - My second year of seminary I was **genuinely discouraged** because it seemed like all my friends were getting big jobs (1 of my good friends had just been hired on staff at a **megachurch**; 2 of my other friends were booked for a year out preaching at student ministries)...
 - Meanwhile, I was **working two jobs**: one was food service and the other was construction. I'd been trying to get out on the speaking circuit; I'd made up **business cards that advertised me as a speaker** that would come to your youth group or your FCA or your rest home (that's not a joke); you didn't even need to pay me.
 - I even had a variation of the business card that called me a 'motivational speaker' so I'd be eligible to speak at your rotary club. During that time I **applied to go on staff at a couple of churches** and got turned down.
 - For some of my friends, everything seemed to be going awesome but my career was going nowhere, and I felt worthless.

- The snare of comparison. Comparison is **dumb for a disciple of Jesus for a couple of reasons:**
 - **One is really practical: First, God has everyone on different development timetables.**
 - I **always tell high school and middle school students** that some of them are like the **POPLAR tree, which** grows like a weed the moment it's planted, others are like the **bamboo tree, which shows no growth for 5 years** but then shoots up **90 feet in that 5th year**.
 - **For adults, that's also true: There are people like Billy Graham who start huge;** there are others who, like Tim Keller, nobody hears of until they are in their late 50's and then they make their biggest impact.
 - **God used Gideon immediately,** but he sent Moses into the wilderness for 40 years after calling him; he sent David into the pasture for 7 years and Paul in the desert for 17 years.
 - Or, in the business world: **Harland Sanders didn't start** Kentucky Fried Chicken until he was 65, and that was after getting fired from about a dozen of his previous jobs.
 - **Winston Churchill won his first election at age 62.** He'd lost *every single election* up to that point. He was 71 when he led England into WW2.
 - **The point is not, "Hold on, you'll be famous and save England from the Nazis one day or that you'll start a successful-but-mediocre fried chicken chain."** No, the point is, "God is writing a unique story in you. Don't compare it with anyone else's."
 - **Eph 2:10** says that God has "*pre-ordained good works that we should walk in them,*" which means he has works

specifically for you he's determined. You don't even really get to decide what they are. Your job is not to go out and manufacture them; your job is to discover them and be faithful to do them.

- I'm so thankful, for example, for Mrs. Thomas, who, in her 70's, said yes to teaching my "Junior Church" when I was in elementary school and birthed in me a love for the Bible. Or, Barry Griffith, a middle aged lawyer who taught my 7th grade Sunday School class each week and taught me to take eternity seriously.
- God has **PREORDAINED certain good works just for you**, and you have to find them and do them because you're the only one who can, and somebody else's spiritual future may depend on it.

Which leads me to **the SECOND reason comparison is dumb: You are specifically designed** for his purpose. PS 139 says that you are fearfully and wonderfully made for that purpose. (I love that phrase, "Fearfully and wonderfully." It means reverently: you are so perfectly designed for God's purpose it creates a sense of awe and wonder).

- **And when it is all said and done**, I am not compared to anyone else, only what I did with what God allotted to me.
- **In Jesus' parable of the talents**, the servant who multiplied his 2 talents into 4 talents got the same commendation as the one who multiplied his 5 into 10, even though he ended up with 50% less output as the 5 talent guy. They both heard the same, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I'll make you ruler over many things."
- And I promise that **in the final moment hearing "well done good and faithful servant" and then being rewarded with your eternal**

responsibilities will matter far more than the size of your little talent allotment on earth.

Satan's third snare is closely related to the snare of comparison--it's:

3. The Snare of COMPETITION: You only feel good about yourself when you WIN.

- Question: Are you the **kind of person** who always has to win, always has to be first, to feel good about yourself? As in, if you LOSE, you're not just frustrated at the loss because you could have done better, but you fume about it for the rest of the day, if not weeks? You feel humiliated--and you think mean, hateful thoughts about the person who beat you, running scenarios where they get humiliated and really get put in their place?
- **Now, y'all: Let me be clear: competition can be good;** it can bring out the best in us; but when competition is used to create or maintain a self-image it becomes DEADLY and brings out the WORST in us.
- Are you the kind of person who can't stand to lose?
 - **One of my favorite all time movies: The 1979 movie Chariots of Fire.** The story of two guys in Scotland in the 1920's who were both incredible runners. Both would end up running for Great Britain in the 1924 Olympics. **One, Eric Liddell runs for the glory of God, and it's nothing but joy (pic: iconic image of him)--he can run; he can not run, he can give up his spot in the Olympics if he needs, it's all just freedom and joy;** the other, Harold Abrams, ran out of a need to prove himself. At one point in the movie, he said to his girlfriend right before one of his qualifying races, "In one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet

wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence. But will I?"

- "10 lonely seconds to justify my existence." That's how many **people function in competition**. They can't stand to lose, because their self-worth is on the line in every competition. "I've got 10 lonely seconds to prove my worth."
- **It's like you're a SWIMMER ABOUT TO SWIM**, and at the finish line is a banner that says "acceptance..." And we're thrashing with all our might through the water, because unless we get there first, we feel like we won't be accepted; we won't have worth.
- **For many of us, competition brings out the WORST in us: it makes us ANXIOUS, HATEFUL, BITTER, JEALOUS, Most of all, EXHAUSTED.** And that's because competition is tied to our self-image.
- The snare of competition.

Satan's 4th Snare:

4. The Snare of CONDEMNATION

- This is where Satan uses your personal failures and shortcomings to tear you down.
 - Obviously, **Jesus had no failures or shortcomings**, but Satan is still urging him to base his identity on what he has or has not accomplished, rather than what God says about him, and when Satan does that with us, the first thing he highlights is our shortcomings and failures. He'll say, "Forget what the Father said about you at your baptism. Look at all you've messed up. If you were a son or daughter of God, it would not be like this. You'll never amount to anything."
 - "You'll never be a good spouse. You are damaged goods."

- "You'll never have friends. Look at all your damaged relationships. You are a train wreck."
- "Someone with sinful weaknesses like yours will never make a Christian. God sees through you. No way he counts you as a Christian."
- **We talked about this last week...** Satan loves to make you **feel bad** about your sin.
 - He's called 'the **ACCUSER** of the brethren.' 'The Brethren' means = Christians. Through his accusations, he makes genuine Christians feel like they are not really Christians. Which means he's always there to remind you how you've messed up and where you don't measure up.
 - He's always saying "Prove yourself. God won't love you until you prove you are worthy of love."
- **And it's like I said last week**, the things he often accuses you of are true! Which is what makes his lies so deceptive! The sins and weaknesses that he identifies are real. Where the lie comes in is that he gets you to base your identity, how God feels about you, on those failures, rather than on what God has declared over you in the gospel.

You see, like I said last week: Both the Holy Spirit and the Demonic will point out your sin. The difference is that demons use what you did to make you question the love and acceptance of God; the Holy Spirit uses the assurance of the love of God to redeem and rebuild what you did.

Write this down: **Satan starts with what you did and tears down who you are; the Holy Spirit starts with who you are (in Christ) and repairs what you did.**

- **Satan uses your failures to attack your identity.** He starts with what you did and tears down who you are.
- **The Holy Spirit starts with your identity--what God has declared you to be; who he has recreated you to be--and calls you to rise above and repair what you did.**
- **I've told this story before, but it seems to fit here... but when my older girls were about 7 and 5,** Kharis, my oldest, had this deal where she didn't always like to try new things, especially if they were scary. And I was always on her about it. "Hey, you've gotta be willing to try new stuff if you're going to succeed." Well, the fair was coming to town **and** we were all talking about it and what we were going to do and I mentioned some of these rides and in the rear view mirror immediately I saw her expression change, and she said, "Daddy, I don't want to ride any fast rides. I'm scared." And I said, "Kharis, you're going to have to learn to try new things. You can't always be so afraid." And I'll never forget this. She looked down and said, "I know daddy, sometimes I think I'm just a big scaredy-cat." And I said, "That's right, Kharis. You are a big scaredy-cat sometimes and you need to change that if you are going to succeed in life." (It was not my finest parenting moment). Well, just then (and I'll never forget this moment, either), I catch my younger daughter's expression in the back mirror--she's 5 at the time, and she's even looking at me, she's just looking at Kharis so earnestly and she says, 'Oh no, Kharis. You are not a scaredy-cat. You are my big sister and you can do anything.'" And I thought, "Great. My daughter is the voice of the Holy Spirit, and I am the voice of Satan."
- **When you mess up, God says, "I love you. I've never stopped loving you."** You are my beloved son. I can give you the power to be that!"

SATAN has one, primary goal for you: he wants you to remove your eyes from what God has declared over you, and to build your identity on your circumstances, how you compare to others or how well you've lived.

And once you succumb to that temptation, he's got you. That's the root of so many temptations.

By contrast, you see, GOD grants our identity to us, in the gospel, as a gift.

Think about it: God declared Jesus' identity over him in Matthew 3, before the Temptation--before he'd been tested. Before he'd done anything!

- **And that DECLARATION was the STRENGTH by which Jesus overcame Satan's temptation.**
- Because Jesus knew God was his Father, and that God was with him and for him and in him, and intimately close to him, he had the power to resist Satan in the wilderness. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus as Jesus embraced his identity.

The same thing is true for you. Knowing your identity before the Father is what gives you the power to overcome any sin!

- **Let's go back** to our little **SWIMMING PLATFORM**. Only now, imagine that "acceptance" is not the banner waiting at the end, but the little platform you jump off of. That says 'acceptance,' and you swim not from the desire to prove you are a beloved son, but from the assurance that you already are one.

You see, awareness of God's acceptance, awareness of your identity is what gives you the ability to live the Christian life!

- The only ones who get better in the Christian life (ironically) are those who know their acceptance is not based on them getting better.
- One of the BEST EXAMPLES of this is JOHN 8...
 - Jesus knew she'd never have the ability to break the cycle of sin until she had the assurance of a stronger love she'd found in the Father.
 - **(We don't know what drove this woman's sin,** but for a lot of people, what they are seeking in sexual intimacy is something they can really only find in God." So Jesus gives her the assurance she is looking for before he gives her the command to change, because she'll never have the power to change until she feels the strength and security of his assurance.
- Write this down: **God's acceptance is the power that liberates you from sin, not the reward for having liberated yourself.**
 - You gain the power to begin the Christian life from the assurance that it is finished.
 - My "do" in the Christian life starts from the finish line of his "done."

I've explained this before: so many of my own sins have come from the root of not really believing what God has declared over me in the gospel:

- I've told this story before--but like 10 years ago. I asked Veronica **one night as we were lying in bed one night** to help me identify what sins I most struggle with to see if I could discern a pattern in them--some kind of root cause in my relationship with God that gave birth to these sins. **So, I had a pad,** and I said, 'What sins do I

struggle the most with?" FTR, that was a mistake: She started to rattle them off like they were some list she had memorized and been cultivating for years. I'm pretty sure they came out rhyming, in the form of a spoken word.

- *One was anger...* In 2 situations. Disrespected; or, if I lose an argument. **If I lose an argument, I'll stew on it the rest of the day, and I'll RERUN it in my mind until I win it.** (Are you like that? Always rerun arguments until you win? You're like, "Oh yeah, when they said..., I should have said...") Y'all, I've lost lots of arguments; I've never run a rerun!
 - **Why does losing an argument bother me so much?**
Because I've built my identity on being smart. I feel like people value me and will respect me if I'm smart, and if I'm losing arguments or being disrespected, that challenges my very soul. **I need the validation of others to have a sense of worth and identity.**
 - **Lying: "I want you to like me because your affirmation is my identity."**
 - **The same thing is at work when I worry... I worry about not succeeding**
 - **It's what is at work in my jealousy.** I get jealous of people who are more successful than me, doing better than me, and fantasize about their downfall. Why? If they are getting the attention I feel like I need to have value.
 - Do you see a pattern? ***You are like, "Bro, you are one sick dude. Are you sure you should be a pastor?"*** You're the same way, I've just got the courage to be honest. *Of course, I'm probably hoping you'll admire me for my courage and honesty."* See? *It just keeps spiraling all the way down.*
 - **I'm trying to become something in your eyes that God has already made me in Christ.**
- **I crave your affirmation, you see, because I'm not confident in his.**

- Ever since middle school, I have built my identity on the approval of others. And that has led me to all kinds of insecurities and sins.
 - **Proverbs 29:25**, (a verse I wish I'd memorized in middle school), "The fear of man is a snare..."
- All those sins I mentioned are snares: Jealousy. Anxiety. Fear.
 - "Snares" could also include: EATING disorders. DEPRESSION. MEDICATING through pornography or illicit sexual relationships. SUICIDAL thoughts.
 - Many of these problems grow out of, in part, a **FEAR OF MAN, or an attempt to build your identity on what man thinks about you** rather than **what God feels about you**.

The only thing that frees you from those snares is the ASSURANCE of how the FATHER FEELS about you. The assurance that he SAYS to me, "YOU are my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased."

You say, "OK, PASTOR, BUT THAT'S THE PROBLEM. How would God ever feel that way about me? Sure, that's how he felt about Jesus, -- BUT THERE'S NO WAY HE LOOKS AT ME AND SAYS, 'YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED). I mean, I have messed up so much...

Great question.

Do you remember what was happening in **Matthew 3** when Jesus first heard this declaration from the Father? **Jesus was getting baptized...** It was John's Baptism, called a "Baptism of Repentance." **IOW, people were being baptized as a show of repentance** from their sins.

- **If it was a baptism of repentance, why was Jesus participating? What would he need to repent of?** He'd never sinned. If he'd never sinned, why would he need to undergo a baptism of repentance?
- **John the Baptist asked him that very question: Jesus' answer: "To fulfill all righteousness."**
 - **Whose righteousness?** He was already fully righteous so there was nothing to fulfill.
 - He was being baptized to fulfill my righteousness, and yours.
 - He was repenting for us. He was going to live the life we were supposed to live. COLLECTING NAME TAGS. Substitution. He became my sin.
- **THE GOSPEL IS that God made him who knew no sin...** He took our place. He took on my sin. He went through a baptism of repentance and then died under judgment in my place so that I could be called a beloved son of God.
 - **When I put my faith in Jesus**, my sin became his and his perfect record became mine.
 - We often compare it to what happens when you get married. On July 28, 2000, Veronica and I said 'I do' to each other and all that was hers became mine... I clearly got the better end of that deal, except for one thing. I was already working, so I had a fairly nice car and some extra income and a decent savings account. She had just graduated, so she had school debt and a car w/o air conditioning...
 - But I did it joyfully, of course, because I was so in love with her. I was so joyful, in fact, that I'm still bringing it up 25 years later, still trying to come out better in that argument.
 - The same thing is true when you take Jesus as your Savior. All that was yours became his--the sin, the shame, and

condemnation--and what was his became yours--his righteousness, his glory, his spotless record, his Spirit.

- John 1:12 says that to many as just RECEIVED him, to them he gave the power, the ability, to become the children of God.
- And if you've done that, that means **WHEN GOD SEES YOU**, he sees the perfect life of Jesus. All that was his became yours. And **so he says to me**, "YOU ARE MY beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And as you **believe that**, his power, to overcome any temptation, flows from inside you--the same Holy Spirit that descended upon Jesus descends upon you, and the demons have to flee.

SO WHAT'S YOUR IDENTITY? If you are a believer, you can say:

- I am not how I compare to others
- I am not the summation of my talents
- I am not my past, my mistakes, or my accomplishments.
- I am not my potential
- I am not the number of my Facebook friends or Tik Tok followers
- I am not where I got into school
- I am not what my parents, my friends or my ex-spouse thinks about me
- I am not how much money I make.
- I am not my sins, my failures or my shame
- I am who the Father says that I am! I am a **son (or daughter) of the King** in whom the **Father is well pleased**.
- **I am loved**. I am loved so much that the Son of God came for me and gave his life for me **and** sees me now only through the eyes of grace.
- He **LITERALLY COULD NOT LOVE** me anymore than he does right now...

- I AM COMPLETE in Christ
- I no longer have to prove I'm somebody when I'm already somebody to him

And that means I have a PURPOSE. *I am:*

- *forgiven,*
- *restored,*
- *redeemed,*
- *made alive,*
- *a new creation,*
- *a CO-HEIR with Christ,*
- *seated in the heavenly places,*
- *FILLED WITH HIS POWER*
- *commissioned by his Spirit;*
- *appointed to walk in blessing and to be a blessing to others;*

- He is for me, not against me. I am who he says I am.
- He **LOVES** me.
- He **STANDS BEHIND** me.
 - My "do" in the Christian life starts from the finish line of his "done."
- He's **PROMISED TO USE** me for good. He's got a **purpose** and a **plan**

Psychologists say YOUR IDENTITY IS WHAT THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN YOUR LIFE... Who is it?

- **For Jesus, that person was the Father.** "*I am who the Father says I am.*"
- **If it's that for you**, you'll have the same power Jesus did.

BOW YOUR HEADS:

- The FATHER SAYS to you, “You are my beloved son/daughter, in whom I am well pleased. I have appointed you for good works, a purpose for which you are fearfully and wonderfully made, and I have put my Spirit in you to give you the power to make it happen.”
- **Sit in this for a moment, as our worship teams come**

But one more thing... I want our prayer teams and elders to come back up here. I've heard from you all week long about how last week touched a nerve. Some of you realize that the power behind these lies you've been believing is the enemy. And for some of you, the real battle started last week. All week long, you've been facing this. And the battle now--the voices of condemnation--you're worthless, you have no value, or even you should end it--are louder than ever. It's not just one sermon you need, you need deliverance. And that's why these prayer teams are here, and elders on the side. If you need them to pray for you, or anything else, come to them. If you just want to pray at the altar, that's ok, too. As we stand, and our worship teams come, you can come now.