**Who You Say I Am**

My daughter Rachel has been writing in a blog she calls *“My Unanticipated Journey”, A Journey Through the Unexpected Twists and Turns of Life, Marriage and Family*.

* She has written about the blessing of her husband Keith, who Lisa and I absolutely love.
* She wrote about the surprises of motherhood and the pure joy of Malachi who we call “Little Man.”
* She also has written of the frustrations and fears of marriage and motherhood.

Recently she posted some thoughts after singing the song “*Who You Say I Am*”.

“*As I was singing I was thinking about freedom and realized…I don’t think that highly of myself. I don’t think of myself as a child of God. I don’t believe that I am a princess of the King of Kings. I believe I am a bad mom many days. I am impatient. I have no self-discipline. I lack humility and kindness. I’m not an encouraging friend. I am a poor wife. I am lazy and boring*.”

She went on, *“I don’t know what I would change…because I am still trying to discover the truth about my true identity in Christ. But I can tell you that the names God calls me are not negative. I am a child of God.”*

Tammy, Trevor, and I are going to sing this right now. We invite you to sing along. We encourage you to allow the message to speak to you.

This morning’s message is going to be less of a sermon and more of an experienced man sharing thoughts.

I know that Rachel’s not alone in her thoughts. I know there’re many here today who struggle with of feeling like you’re just not good enough to wear the name Christian. You feel like…

* you don’t deserve to be called a Christian.
* you’re not a good husband, or a good wife.
* you’re not a good father or mother.
* you do the wrong thing too often.
* you fail to do the right thing often enough.
* you want to be right with God in all things, but you just can’t do it.

Maybe you think of yourself in terms like boring, or worthless, or unlovable.

Maybe you don’t think people want to be your friend, even here at church, people don’t really like you.

Maybe you don’t think you have anything positive to add to the church.

Maybe you just don’t feel very highly of yourself.

I want to remind you today to recognize, you don’t have to be worthy. You are a child of God and He thinks you’re worthy. He makes you worthy.

Acts 20 is the beginning of Paul’s farewell tour. He knows that his life is about to change if not end very soon. He told the Elders of the church in Ephesus,

*“Compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.* Acts 20:22f

That word “*compelled*” means to be tied to something, like he didn’t have a choice. Maybe he didn’t. This was God’s plan.

There’re several things going on in chapter 20. We’re not going to dissect them all, instead we’ll focus on how Paul encouraged believers to recognize who they are in Christ and to continue to grow in that relationship.

Last week we looked at the riot that broke out in Ephesus after Paul preached that idols were impotent and useless.

*When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-by and set out for Macedonia.*

*He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia.* Acts 20:1-3

This sounds like a chronology of his mission and it sort of is, but let’s not miss the importance of what happened. Paul was writing letters to churches during this time and produced some of his best theology; Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Galatians.

Knowing that his life of ministry was nearing its climax, he was thinking of all the people he had led to Christ and his love for them. In response he did two things consistently. One he reminded of the fundamentals of faith, and two he encouraged them to continuing growing in Christ.

This morning I’ll mention a couple of the events of the chapter but I want to focus on how Paul is encouraging and challenging the churches. You can read the historical context yourself.

He had made plans but changed because someone uncovered a plot against him. It’s easy to skip over verse 4 but let’s not.

*He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.*

These names show the kind of people he had gathered. They were likely delegates from some of the churches he started; some were the guys who carried the financial gifts he was collecting to take to Jerusalem for the poverty stricken believers there.

We recognize Gaius and Aristarchus from chapter 19:29. Secundus is mentioned in Romans and 2 Corinthians, and of course we’re very familiar with Timothy.

Verses 7-12 tell the story that every preacher loves. A young man named Eutychus was… *sinking into a deep sleep as Paul…* was preaching. He fell out of a third story window, and died. To be fair, Paul preached a very long sermon. He started during the day when the Christians had gathered for worship and preached all the way to midnight.

We preachers think this should serve as a warning to our listeners when we preach. Don’t be falling asleep during my sermons. I know what you’re thinking, “*Staying awake can be more fatal than falling asleep*” so don’t say it.

Paul was able to revive that young man, but he has become infamous for being the guy who died because he fell asleep in church. You notice, nobody names their sons after him. Have you ever met a baby Eutychus?

Back to Paul’s encouragement tour. We don’t have a specific document that recorded what he said to each of the churches as he visited them. **I’m going to speculate.**

I think we can infer from his writings that he challenged and encouraged them just as he did in his letters. I think he challenged them to live up to way of Christ, and he encouraged them to recognize who they are in Christ.

This isn’t a total guess. I arrived at my conclusion from what he said to the Elders from Ephesus in verses 17-35. With a great sense of finality he talked about himself, about his ministry and suffering for Christ. He talked about his call to go to Jerusalem even though he knew it meant trouble for him.

*I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again*. Verse 25

I have been around a lot of people who could see the end of life. They often will get very sentimental like this. It’s called life review.

During life review people tend to do two things: **one** is they re-affirm good relationships; the **other**, they re-affirm that they are good people.

That’s what Paul did. He reminded himself that he has answered God’s call for his life*. I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God*. Verse 27

He also reminded the Elders who they are, of their call and role in God’s kingdom.

***Keep watch*** *over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.* ***Be shepherds*** *of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So* ***be on your guard***. Verses 28-31

This is more than giving us the basic job description of church Elders. Do you see how he reminds them who they are in Christ? *You are shepherds, overseers of God’s church. You are part of God’s specific plans to keep alive the Bride of Christ*.

I’ll tell you a secret. Church leaders, Elders and preachers experience negative times when we feel like we’re not worthy. We have times when we think we’re not good enough Christians or leaders. We wonder if people really like us or just tolerate us. Sometimes we don’t think we’re good enough husbands and fathers.

In preparing this I went through all of Paul’s letters, listening to hear Paul’s encouraging words.

* I have *Christ Jesus living in me*. 2 Corinthians 13:5
* I am righteous before God because of faith. Romans 3:21
* Jesus *gave Himself to rescue me from evil*. Galatians 1:4
* I am *blessed with every spiritual blessing*. God *chose me* and He thinks I’m *blameless*. I *have forgiveness*, and *I am His son*, a child of God. Ephesians 1:4-11

Why do I think of myself in negative terms? I shouldn’t think of myself that way. I should think of myself the way God thinks of me. I’m a child of God. He has a place for me in His house. More than that, He has a will for me. A will for me to grow in Christ; to be holy.

The word “holy” is a lost word in our society today. Frank Bruni of the New York Times, writing about VP Pence this past week called him self-infatuated, bigoted, cruel, and a liar.

On what did Bruni base his thoughts? It was because Mike Pence says he believes in God and holy living by Biblical values. Apparently holiness is now evil.

Holiness is being set apart for God, chosen by God, called by God. It means we belong to God and we are what He thinks we are.

Instead of thinking of ourselves as unworthy, we should be thinking about how God loves us. We should be focused on the facts that He wants us to grow intellectually and emotionally and spiritually.

John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace once wrote,

*I’m not what I used to be;*

*I’m not what I ought to be;*

*but praise the Lord I’m on my way*

*to becoming all that I was intended to be*.

God doesn’t want us to think poorly of ourselves. You’ll never enjoy the kind of life God has planned you if you maintain a negative self-image. The reason some Christians revel in life is because they accept God’s evaluation. They rejoice in who God says they are and live like children of the King.

This message is for you if you struggle with negative feelings about yourself.

I can think of two ways to overcome these negative feelings. You can get very good at everything so that you have no weaknesses. Of course that’s highly unlikely and if you do manage to get that good, you risk becoming seriously conceited. That brings a whole different set of problems.

The other way to overcome negative self-feelings is to trust the good things God says about you. Try this, read the New Testament from Romans to 1 & 2 Timothy. It won’t take you but an hour or so. Read to hear what God thinks of you.

* Highlight the passages where you learn what God thinks of you.
* Maybe keep a journal writing down the references and how they make you feel.
* Add these ideas to your daily prayers. Thank God for loving you this way and ask Him to help you live in that joy.

If you’re struggling right now or if ever you struggle with feeling good about who you are, remember who God says you are. Discover your true identity, not in your feelings, but in who God says you are.

*You are chosen, not forsaken.*

*You are who God says you are.*

*He is for you, not against you.*

*You are who God says you are.*