

King's Centre sermon – 03/08/2008 – Identity, chains & Freedom

Introduction

I want us to look at HEBREWS 12:1-2 which says

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

From that I want to look at three themes

1. Our Identity – who we are in God;
2. The Chains – things that would hinder and entangle us;
3. Our Freedom – how do we shake this off to run the race?

Identity

The other year I was in Germany for the world cup, with my mate Tony who I used to live with at university.

When we got out there, we met a load of blokes who Tony had worked with, who were all very similar.

Young guys in their late 20s and early 30s, mostly single, all very wealthy and all quite self-focussed and self-centred.

The biggest thing that struck me about them was the second question they all asked.

First question would be “what’s your name?”

The second question would be “WHAT DO YOU DO?”

These guys put so much value, so much stock in WHAT a person does for a career that that becomes WHO the person is.

I don't want my identity to be about WHAT I do, or even WHO I am. But WHOSE I AM.

Look at Jesus – He knew who He was and He knew who He belonged to. The Bible doesn't make reference of Him saying “hi I'm Jesus and I'm a carpenter!”

The fact that He was the Son of God, created in the likeness of God, with the full power of God at His disposal was more important than the employment He had. Jesus knew who he was and whose He was.

In John 14:6-7 Jesus says “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.*” That sounds like someone who is pretty confident of their identity.

So who are we???

In 1 Samuel Chapter 18, there is a story about Jonathan entering into covenant with David and as a sign of this giving David his armour.

Jonathan was a prince and in doing this he gave David his identity. This was in a time before photos and newspapers, so people would recognise the armour not the wearer, as the prince.

David received an identity which had greater resources than his own.

Surely then, this can also be applied to the armour of God in Ephesians 6. Yes, we are being equipped by God, but we are also taking on His identity.

And that is an identity which has greater resources than our own.

The world and the spiritual world will recognise the armour we wear and therefore the identity of God and not the identity of us.

As Christians we inherit the identity of God and all that goes with that, but we don't always live in it.

We're all different but I can tell you who we all CAN BE, that's Jesus.

We can look at any piece of scripture that talks about Jesus and that can be us. Who he is, can be who we are. Bill Johnson sums this up in the following quote:

"Jesus didn't come to show us what God can do [which is anything], Jesus came to show us what one man, in right relationship with the Father, can do."

The Covenant

The reason we can claim this amazing inheritance [i.e. all the resources of heaven] is because we are now in covenant with God. We live under a new covenant.

In the same way that David gained the identity and resources of a prince through his covenant with Jonathan, we gain the identity and the resources of Jesus through the covenant.

The identity of the son of God and all the resources of Heaven.

This is why Jesus says to the disciples,

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even **greater things than these**, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12)

In this passage Jesus is re-assuring the disciples that they will have access to all the resources they need to fulfil the call God has put on their lives. This equally applies to us today.

Chains

However, there are things that mess with our view of the potential that God has put in us and it's those things that can hold us back.

It might be something like:-

- Your finances and money worries;
- Your pursuit for approval of others or fame;
- Striving and working hard at stuff – your work or studies;
- How you spend your time – what you invest yourself in;
- Or it might be the sin that is in your life.

Don't feel judged or condemned in this, Romans 8 :1 says *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”*

I'm interested in the verse I read earlier from Hebrews 12 that says the sin that so easily entangles.

Now if you look at people including Jesus you could draw a graph with two scales. SIN & FREEDOM TO OPERATE.

Jesus without sin was able to operate fully as God intended Him to. We as fallen people with sin in our lives have things that get in the way of us operating fully.

The sin that entangles can take many forms.

- Sex
- Money
- Lying
- Idolatry
- The labels that we've put on ourselves or people/society have put on us.
- The list could go on.

The awesome thing is though, that we can get free of all that stuff, thanks to Jesus. As we fix our eyes on Him it's not that the stuff doesn't still come our way, but that we are in a better place to overcome the things that come our way.

Think of Peter walking on water (MATT 14:25 – 30), he's actually doing it while he fixes his eyes on Jesus, it's only when he gets distracted by the things around him (the storm and the water) that he begins to sink. It's when Jesus isn't his main focus that the ways of the world gain priority over the ways of God.

It's the things that easily entangle that take our eyes off of Jesus as we try to run the race.

Now some of the chains that bind us may be very uncomfortable, ugly ones that we want to be rid of.

BUT some of the things that prevent us from being truly free may be that bit more comfortable and attractive.

It's like tying a prisoner with rusty old chains and rough ropes, as well as silk scarves and padded chains. They'd be aware of one type of restraint, so they would seek to escape from the rusty chains and the rough ropes, but they might not even know that they are still bound up by the more comfortable restraints.

A prisoner can never be truly free while ever they remain imprisoned.

You might even come to rely upon the chains that bind you to form part of your identity.

- **story about me and my back pain** -

We can't let the chains continue to hold us back and continue to define who we are.

We are bigger than a set of chains.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made; we are wonderful works of God. We are made in the likeness of God and have the ability to operate in the manner which Jesus did.

I want you to think about the things that hold you back and know that God will help you break those patterns and help you to put Him first in your life. John 10:10 says "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*"

God wants everything in our lives to give us life to the full for Him.

As we do this and let God break the chains that hold us back, remember that this is all about freedom, not about losing part of ourselves.

Freedom

So how do we get free? Well I think that's a two stage thing. Firstly, letting stuff go, getting rid of patterns and mindsets and secondly letting God fill us with what He's got for us.

God doesn't require us to break our own chains in order to meet His standards before we can receive what He's got for us - remember that God is a God of grace, not of law.

And to show that, we can look at the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, which is in JOHN 8.

This woman was entangled in the sin of adultery and the consequence she faced was death through the law, but the grace of Jesus gave her freedom. The story finishes with Jesus saying to her “neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin.”
He doesn’t say “leave your life of sin and then I won’t condemn you.”

The difference is immense and the difference is amazing. The difference shows that God is for you, that He loves you and what you do has no impact on how much He loves you.

So your freedom is just the beginning. The verse from Hebrews says “*let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*”

We can’t run a race with our shoe laces tied together, and ropes round our legs.
God gives us the freedom not just for the sake of it, but in order to run the race.

The race is different for each of us, for some it’s about fulfilling a specific calling, for others it’s more general, simply about living a life for Jesus. But regardless our response needs to be the same.

- Do you know your identity in God?
- What are the things that easily entangle you?
- Are you living in freedom to fully take hold of what God’s got for you?