

Identity (Re)Defined 2 - God (Re)Defines my past identity

Intro

In this series we are going to be talking about what we think of ourselves and how we find our identity. This is, and has always been, a crucial topic for middle and high school students. The reason that this is so important is because for the first time in your life, you are becoming your own person in your thought, interests, and beliefs, not because of your parents but because that's who you are.

That is not to say that your parents can't or won't have any influence on who you become during these years, in fact they will have a significant impact on you for better or worse. Additionally, you will be influenced by your friends, teachers, mentors, music, movies, and all forms of social media. Who you become and how you identify will be a combination of all of these things. Not surprisingly, God has a lot to say about who are you and what you can become and for this series we will consider the wisdom and advice we can learn from God as we all consider who I am and who you are becoming.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

John 8:31-32

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Faith = Believing the Bible is true regardless of my thoughts, feelings, or circumstances.

Today we are going to look at two people who could have been defined by where they came from and the choices they made. However, God can and does define and redefine our past as we will see in the examples we look at today.

Saul/Paul's past

Acts 8:1-3

1 And Saul approved of his execution.

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

- Execution refers to the stoning of Stephen
- Saul approved and continued the persecution of those who followed Jesus

Acts 22:3-5

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

- Paul/Saul was a product of his upbringing - raised a devout Jew and studied under respected Rabbi's
- He zealously followed and did everything he was expected to do, even though it was wrong
- He imprisoned and killed Christians because they followed Jesus

Rahab's Past

Joshua 2:1-7

1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. 2 And it was told to the king of Jericho, "Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." 3 Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land."

4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5 And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." 6 But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. 7 So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.

- Rahab was a prostitute and ran her "business" out of her house
- The spies hid in Rahab's house, likely because it would not be out of place for men to be going there
- Rahab had such a reputation and/or successful "business" that the king sent people to investigate the rumors that spies had come to their city
- We don't have specific information, but one can imagine the choices she made and things she did to acquire such a reputation that it made sense for the king to make her part of the investigation

They believed

Acts 22:6-16

6 "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 8 And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' 11 And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

12 "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. 14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

- Saul the persecutor of the church believed in Jesus as a result of this experience.
- Jesus miraculously appeared to him and he responded to that in faith

Joshua 2:8-14

8 Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof 9 and said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. 10 For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

11 And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. 12 Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign 13 that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." 14 And the men said to her, "Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."

- Rahab believed in God based on what she knew about Him and what He had been doing
- Her faith God motivated her to help the spies and was the reason that her family was spared when Jericho was attacked

They Were Changed

Romans 8:1-2 (Not condemned, Free)

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

- Because of Jesus we are no longer condemned by our sin, instead we have been set free from death itself

Galatians 5:1 (Free from sin)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

- We are changed, no longer are we slaves to sin, we are free because of Christ.
- He freed us so we can choose freedom from sin, no it to continue it it.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (Made new)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

- In Christ we are completely new, nothing of the old sinful self remains.

Acts 22:17-21

17 "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' 19 And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. 20 And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' 21 And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

- Saul was not only saved by God through his faith, God changed his life purpose from hunting Christians to telling lost people about Gentiles.
- Saul was specifically sent to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles. As people got saved in each town he went to he setup churches to continue the work of of the gospel after he left.
- Most of the New Testament is made up of letters written by Saul/Paul continuing his teaching and ministry he started in each of those towns.
- Pauls entire past was completely reversed through the work of God

Matthew 1:1-6

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ...5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of David the king.

- We don't have exact details of Rahab's life after the destruction of Jericho
- However, we know from this text that she become part of the Jews
- Much more than that, she is the great, great, great (etc.) grandmother of Jesus Christ
- God made her part of the genealogy of how Jesus came into the world
- Rahab's reputation is no longer a story about poor and disgusting choices, her reputation is now about God's grace and love that covers completely her past sins.

Faith = Believing the Bible is true regardless of my thoughts, feelings, or circumstances.

Today the main point is if you believe the Bible is true, then it doesn't matter what details make up you where you come from or the choices that have brought you to this point. The good news of the gospel is that God can make you new through your faith in him.

Discussion Questions

- What was the most meaningful thing to you about today's lesson?
- In your own words describe Saul/Paul's past? How would you describe Rahab's past? How are they similar? How are they different?
- What was special about how Saul/Paul came to faith in Jesus? What part(s) of his story do you think are more common when someone believes in Jesus?
- How do you think Rahab came to believe in God? What do you think she knew? What did she not know? What was most important to her?
- What was it about Saul/Paul or Rahab that made God want to save them?
- Did God *have* to define or redefine their past or did He choose to? Why or why not?
- What does it say about that He used Saul and Rahab in big ways despite their past?
- Do you think there were things in Saul's or Rahab's past they were ashamed of?
- How does the truth of the Bible inform how Saul and Rahab should look at their past?
- How should the truth of the Bible shape how you view your past? Is any part of that hard to grasp or believe?
- How do you think faith can help dealing with shame, embarrassment, or guilt from your past?
- Would one or two people be willing to share their story of how God has affected your life despite your past? [Leaders this would be a great opportunity to briefly share your personal testimony]