

“I Don’t Belong to this World”

Series: Identity: Becoming Who We Are
May 14, 2017 – Brad Bailey

Matthew 3:17-4:1; 8-11 (ESV)

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Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

...Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” ¹¹

Then the devil left him..”

1. This world has been ruled by a spiritual force who gains control as we give our trust to self-glorifying power - – in wealth, fame, and pleasure.

Father, I don't ask you to take my followers out of the world, but keep them safe from the evil one. ¹⁶ They don't belong to this world, and neither do I. ¹⁷ Your word is the truth. So let this truth make them completely yours. ¹⁸ I am sending them into the world, just as you sent me. - John 17:15-18 (CEV)

2. The power to unite with Jesus in being distinct from this world... lies not in our separation or superiority....but in our _____ from belonging to it's power to control who we are.

3. The power of our true God-given identity...and it's freedom... requires the courage to _____ to the identity this world offers.

“By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.” Heb. 11:24

4. Maturity will require willingness to be faithful apart from what anyone else may see or affirm.

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(Note: This message also coincided with Mother’s Day...so while the focus remained in this series on Identity... some illustrations were woven in which reflect the significance of mothers.)

Intro

Continuing in our series and focus on IDENTITY... and getting ahold of who we are.

Those familiar with South America know it’s had its share of countries in conflict between government and rebel forces which draw from the masses and fight guerrilla warfare out of the jungles from which they live.

The most extensive is that of Columbia. For 52 year...more than half a century, the FARC guerilla soldiers have fought against the governing powers in the longest running war in the Western hemisphere. The tragedy is that the soldiers are often recruited as young boys...and sometimes girls. As young lives...they are given a sense of purpose....and of power. And ultimately...with that uniform...and rifle...they find a new identity.

In recent years there have finally been peace talks... but the new government wondered if there would be any way to get these soldiers to demobilize and reenter society. It’s the identity they had lived with for so long. These soldiers felt too lost from their past.

So the government hired a creative ad executive, **Jose Miguel Sokoloff**, to convince these lives to give up without firing a shot. They did campaigns at Christmas in which lights illuminated the way out of the forest and back home.

But **in December 2013**... they brought forth a new campaign... simply called "**Mothers' Voices.**" They found 37 mothers of guerrilla fighters who were willing to give them pictures of those fighters as children. They printed up thousands of these posters and hung them in towns that the guerrillas moved through and nailed them to trees as well.

And the **message was, "Before you were a guerrilla, you were my child. Come back home. I'm waiting for you."**

Over 200 lives found their way home because a mother loved them...and reminded them who they were.

It’s a great reminder of the power of a mother. Many mothers here today have felt that voice rise up within your own mother’s soul... that voice that wants to call a child out from powers that have recruited them. It is not the voice which calls them back to childhood...it is the voice that calls them to be the men and women they were meant to be.

From God’s perspective...we are those recruited with promises of purpose and power... who have lost who we are. We are those who were recruited into a force that is fighting for power... but has no future...and our identity is lost. Somewhere we were made an offer... to be join what would make us special... and like those young soldiers it was intimidating to think of saying no...and slowly we repress more and more of who we were meant to be...and we accept the terms of our new identity.

The Bible begins with a poetic summary in which a serpent gets human life to give up their identity and in doing so...he rules a world that sold it's soul so to speak.

And when God comes...to restore our idensity... that same figure is spoken of again..

Jesus calls John to baptize him.. as his own sign of being set apart...and we read...

Matthew 3:17-4:1 (ESV)

“... behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

We are further told he is drawn into 40 days in the wilderness... during which he is fasting. Fasting is that which allows someone to focus on what lies deeper in life...to forgo one hunger to face more deeply what controls us. So this is a time of **testing** the depth of his calling... of testing the power of what was just declared from the heaven. And that same spiritual force...referred to as the devil or Satan...comes and **brings three temptations**... or tests. **The first is using his power** to turn stones into bread...to provide for himself. The second is to use his power over angels...and the thirds that of power and fame as we read...

Matthew 4:8-11 (ESV)

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ““You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”” ¹¹ Then the devil left him..”

This proves to be a moment that sets the trajectory of so much that follows. Jesus defies the terms of accepting self-glorifying power...and leaves that wilderness more resolute and launches into a full assault on the powers that lie behind this world. And the enemy realizes that he is not able to control this one now present in Creation... he realizes that there is one who is not bound to the terms by which the enemy has ruled...and what unfolds from this point on...is the enemy becoming more resolute in stopping Jesus...this one who came to restore the glory of all life back to God...something he may have believed he finally accomplished when he was crucified...but that would lead to the defeat of death...the beginning of the enemy's rule.

What Jesus engaged...was what lies behind all life.
SO the first vital truth for us to understand...is that...

1. This world has been ruled by a spiritual force who gains control as we give our trust to self-glorifying power - – in wealth, fame, and pleasure.

It is revealed as the **unseen reality** of what **lies behind who we are.**

In the garden of God's original creation... come that deceiver who comes desperately seeking his own glory... and suggests to humanity that we can be gods... if we only choose to accept our independence from God.

This world has been ruled by a spiritual force **we sold our true identity to...who “owns us” because we accepted his terms...** which is the pursuit of self-glorifying power – in wealth, fame, and pleasure.

The Bible simply reveals that we lost our identity and that the reality of our lives is that of living declaring our freedom as **self-ruling beings...** who in fact are **slaves to the power we seek.**

This is what **J.R. Tolkein** was capturing in **The Lord of the Rings...** as the ring is that which gives one power...but is ultimately a consuming power...that will lead to all being destroyed in it's pursuit.

It is this quest for power and glory that owns us.

I know that is a major statement to make about human life and history.

Some of us may know how true it is because it is our story.

Some may wonder. I encourage each of us to take a good look at all of human history and life...and see if this is not true.

- From **Middle School** when we realize more fully that that we are individuals...and how much we want to fit in to the world of lives around us...to be accepted. It's hard...a period we often try to forget... but one that is never really over. Because the power of trying to find our self-glorifying identity is reflected everywhere...from Middle School to **Middle Management** is the workplace to the **Middle East** where the world cannot find peace.
- From the **terrorist** who are told that they can find meaning... by giving up their lives for purposeto make a difference...something we westerners often scoff at...while those terrorist look the same way at the role of the **television** ...which tells us every day what will make our lives meaningful...who we need to be ...what we need to buy....what we will sell our souls to.
- And there as we watch...we hear it from **religious leaders** who sell prosperity to the **real estate programs** that promise the same.

It's this element of what rules this world system that Jesus faces...and says “no” to.

This is what the Bible describes as the “world” in a negative way.

It is really important that we understand that when the Bible speaks of this “world” negatively...it s NOT speaking about this planet... nor any element of this planet itself. It is speaking of the **spiritual force that rules this world...** the self-glorifying force that not only runs **behind** it...but also now **runs through it...** because it is a force that we have accepted.

When Jesus (and the Scriptures) speak negatively about “the world” ... it is **not referring to all people or any people in particular** ...but rather it is speaking about what we might call “the spirit” of this world... a general position and posture that attempts to declare it's won rule and glory.

It is this sense of the “world” which Christ does not belong to. For he has come from the eternal realm to break that power... to release us from what rules us...and to restore us to the home and heart of our Creator and source... our Father in heaven.

We can hear this in the words of Jesus when... in one of his final prayers on earth...he prays..

John 17:15-18 (CEV)

¹⁵ Father, I don't ask you to take my followers out of the world, but keep them safe from the evil one. ¹⁶ They don't belong to this world, and neither do I. ¹⁷ Your word is the truth. So let this truth make them completely yours. ¹⁸ I am sending them into the world, just as you sent me.

We are called to be “in the world... but not of the world.”

It is not a call to care less about this world...but rather to care MORE about it...it is what God cares so much about that he came

Some of us may be afraid that this **world has to mean everything** to us in order to do well....that we will fail if we don't fit in.

But the **opposite proves true**. When what you are doing is freed from defining you... from being that which proves you have a place you belong....you actually enjoy it more...because you enjoy it for what it is.

- Recently there have been some NBA players who have had family losses in the midst of the season... drawn away to the bedsides and funerals where they belonged at a deeper level...and upon their quick returns... many expected they would less engaged...but played with a freedom that was remarkable... not simply inspired by those they loved...but free because they were reminded that they didn't have to prove the right to belong... they already had a place they belonged.

> How much more does Jesus reveal that we are truly free when we no longer need to prove that we matter?

So the second core truth is this...

2. The power to unite with Jesus in being distinct from this world... lies not in our separation or superiority....but in our freedom from belonging to it's power to control who we are.

Jesus didn't need this world's approval. That is what changes everything.

It's not easy to join him in this way. We all want approval. It's **natural** to want approval...the problem is **needing** it.

The problem is not knowing who we.

This is what we see in Jesus being tested. His eternal identity was declared to his human nature. Could he bear that identity in this world with forces that ruled against it? He did ...and it bore the power to re-take this world.

And so we learn that...

3. The power of our true God-given identity...and it's freedom... requires the courage to say “no” to the to the identity this world offers.

We tend to think that we find our identity by saying “yes” to God. But there is no “yes” without there being a “no” to who we are not.

“We must be able to say what is ‘not me’ in order to have a ‘me’. Our yes has no meaning if we never say no.” - Henry Cloud

Our identity is only as true as we are able to say “no” to what we are not.

We may discover more deeply who someone is... not by what they say “yes” to...but what they say “no” to.

We may discover more deeply who WE ARE...not by what they say “yes” to...but what they say “no” to.

> You will never be anyone until you grow clear that you are not someone else.

This is not easy. Y own life found this to be the real challenge. When I was a teenager... I heard of what God had done to make himself known...and set this world right...and it led to finding new life...and a truth was sown ... that took root... but it wasn’t normal to most of those I did school life with....so I would soon feel myself to live in two worlds...and it was hard to stay true to who I was when I was with those who didn’t share that. So I lived between two worlds... unsettled identity.

> I reached a point that I really put it on the line with God... it was time to settle this...and He met me in that moment. I realized that I always knew that call...the issues was not so much my “yes” to God...but my lack of saying “no” to the ways around me. (Interesting... but some of those I would run with... I could tell later... respected my strength to be different more than my willingness to join in all the same ways.)

Looking back...we can see this in the life of Moses.

The Israelites had come to land of Egypt...and now become slaves to this enormous empire. But as they grew in numbers...they became a threat...to the ruling Pharaoh declared that the newborn Israelites were to be killed. But the mother of Moses chose to give her infant a chance...placed him in a reed basket on the Nile upstream from where the Egyptian women bathed...and he was pulled out by Pharaoh’s daughter and taken as her own...raised in the Pharaoh’s palace as his son.

This would lead to a defining moment... summed up this way:

“By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.” Heb. 11:24 (NIV)

I think it’s safe to say that Moses had a legitimate identity crisis. He knew what his identity was rooted in... but the identity he was living was now more familiar... and held everything his world knows in terms of a self-glorifying life.

Wealth – As best I know... the Pharaoh was the center of more wealth than any other in the entire world... and his sons would have it all...

Pleasure – harems everywhere...feasts galore...they could indulge beyond without limit.

Popularity – He was the guy...the bachelor... the top celebrity...TMZ followed him everywhere.

He could fake it and have everything...or embrace what he knew deep down...and lose everything.

But...do you remember the Pharaoh's name? Probably few do...we really don't know. [3] But Moses...is a name known throughout the world.

Why? Because he became a liberator... and his freedom began "**when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.**" It had the courage to say "no" to the powers of this world.

Was this easy? No. If we look at those few words...they remind us that he didn't know how it would all work out...he **had to step out in faith**...and it **required maturity**. "... when he had grown up..." Refusing to belong to this world is a **mark of spiritual maturity**.

And he would discover another truth. He wouldn't just be able to exchange one source of popularity for another. We think I will join that group... be special there...heroic... Moses thought that when he declared that he was a Hebrew...he would find himself amidst those he truly belonged to. One day he sees an Egyptian guard strike down an Israelite slave...and Moses in turn strikes down the Egyptian guard. He turns to the Israelites... likely expecting this to be his moment for a big family hug...and they say: "Get away from us"...they reject him because they expect that this will just bring more problems down on them..

In truth he was acting selfishly... he didn't know their plight... he thought he could just be the hero.

So he walks off into the desert...and would spend the next 40 years in the desert... eventually with a family and home...but never rooted.

Some of us may be in a season like Moses... we may feel we have walked away from the world...but we are in the desert...we don't really want God's call. We are afraid or bitter.

And then God called Him. And Moses responded ..."But those people..." sort of like when we say... "but they are hypocrites..."... or "they don't deserve my heroism... they don't appreciate me." And God confronts him... and it's clear...God is talking about them...He is talking to Moses and Moses is being called to embrace God's call.

Every great leader has had to make choices that they believed were right... even when they might be misunderstood by everyone.

Moses had to learn that...

4. Maturity will require willingness to be faithful apart from what anyone else may see or affirm.

We spend so much of our lives looking at others... doing what we think they want us to do...or blaming them for our decisions. Moses now was led to realizing that he was going to have to answer for himself. He was going to have to stop looking at others...and instead be willing to live his life in relationship to an audience of one. [4]

We don't find ourselves (our identity) by simply changing from seeking one group's acceptance to that of another group...but by discovering there is One we already belong to...and always will. We belong to the home and heart of our eternal Father who created us.

I want to read some words from a letter written by a mother to her 18 year old son...who had tried to run away from God...from God's calling... and was now unsettled in the desert. He did what many do... he just focused on how others were hypocrites. He was hiding in the desert ... avoiding the voice of God.

His mother responded with many words of care...but also of calling out. She wrote...

I've thought constantly about our phone conversation since last night - I only wish I had all the right answers for you.

I know you're going through a difficult time and have been most of this year-trying to decide if you're going to live for the Lord or the world. It appears you've compromised everything trying to straddle the fence-feeling one way but living the other. This can really tear you apart!

The thing is what we have to do is make our own commitment and do our best right in the middle of the world-we can't live like monks. And we can't blame anyone else if we fall along the way. The responsibility is entirely our own.

I was sure our social life would fall apart when I stopped drinking-but interestingly it hasn't. People are just a bit more aware of their behavior. The point is simply I had to decide what I was going to do-regardless of what others thought.

So what I guess I'm saying is you're going to have to decide who and what you're going to be from the inside-no matter where you are or who you're with. I wish I could be the perfect example for you so I could say you see how right I am, but, of course I'm not and never will be. And neither will anyone else-we're all going to make lots of mistakes.

So, put your trust the only place that's constant-in the Lord-and accept the rest of us the way we are.

We love you very much, Mom

Significant truth...written to me almost 39 years ago (August 1978)...by my mother.

The truth is that I didn't appreciate these words at the time.... It wasn't something I wanted to face... but the truth of these words would define what I faced and forged over the next two years of my life....as I decided to come back from the islands in Hawaii where I had run... and start college returned back on the mainland.

I was still struggling between the world I didn't know how to be distinct from ...and the knowledge of God's love I couldn't escape. In the months ahead ...I made choices...and they were mine... and they led to a new community of lives...but also to times where I felt I was walking around with Jesus alone...and it was good.

Maybe you have someone or some group that is somehow an explanation for your response to God's call. There comes that time....when we stop focusing so much out there...at everybody else....and have to face ourselves.

Closing...

Like those soldiers in the jungles of Columbia...God is calling us to come home.

... to know that we have an eternal home...and that WE DON'T BELONG TO THIS WORLD.
For some... we realize we almost forgot.
For some... you may just realize... not settled. God don't sell your identity to the powers of this world.

Notes:

1. Regarding the Moher's Voices Campaign – Initially found story via Matt Woodley, editor, PreachingToday.com; source: Adapted from Ira Glass, "The Poetry of Propaganda," This American Life (12-18-15) <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2016/april/3041816.html>
Further, according to CBS report...218 mothers received children...which was larger than some previous campaigns. - <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-colombia-advertising-to-sell-peace-not-products/>
2. Regarding being “in but not of” this world, the context of Jesus’ own words in his prayer to the Father, makes it clear that the ultimate goal at hand is being “sent into” the world as he was. So the emphasis is not one of simply accepting that one must stay “in” the world...but that for the sake of fulfilling this vital God mission “into” the world, they must remain free of it’s rule. A good article on this is “Let’s Revise the Popular Phrase “In, But Not Of” by David Mathis (Aug 29, 2012). Executive Editor, desiringGod.org at <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/let-s-revise-the-popular-phrase-in-but-not-of>
3. Most Judeo-Christian tradition has associate Ramesses as the father and Ramesses II as Moses’ step brother. However Alfred Edersheim proposes in his "Old Testament **Bible** History" that Thutmose II is best qualified to be the **pharaoh** of Exodus based on the fact that he had a brief, prosperous reign and then a sudden collapse with no son to succeed him.
4. Romans 14:12 (NLT) - “Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.”

“I Don’t Belong to this World”

Series: Identity: Becoming Who We Are/ May 14, 2017 – Brad Bailey

Who are you? Where do you find your sense of self and self worth? It is a life defining question. In our current series we’re focusing on the transforming power of discovering our true identity in Christ. This week we’re exploring how our identity shaped. What forces are at work attempting to shape our identity? And what can we learn from Jesus’ encounter with these powerful forces?

Connecting Question: In honor of Mother’s Day, what characteristics or traits did you inherit from your mother?

Read Matthew 3:17-4:1; 8-11 (ESV)

“... behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ...Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”” ¹¹ Then the devil left him..”

- 1. In this account of Jesus’ life, Jesus receives his Father’s commendation, but is then immediately drawn into the wilderness to be tested. What can we learn from Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness about the powers of this world?**
- 2. What was Jesus being offered?**
- 3. In what ways do we experience the powers of this world trying shape our identity?**
- 4. What is the identity the world offers?**

Quote: “We tend to think that we find our identity by saying “yes” to God. But there is no “yes” without there being a “no” to who we are not. Our identity is only as true as we are able to say “no” to what we are not.”

- 5. What are we saying no to?**

Read John 17:15-18 (CEV)

Father, I don't ask you to take my followers out of the world, but keep them safe from the evil one. ¹⁶ They don't belong to this world, and neither do I. ¹⁷ Your word is the truth. So let this truth make them completely yours. ¹⁸ I am sending them into the world, just as you sent me. -

6. **Jesus understood the power struggles we would experience in this world. How does he pray for us?**
7. **What can we learn from this about how we are to live in the world without becoming of it?**

Developing a truer sense of our Identity in Christ will involve standing apart from what others value. There comes that time....when we stop focusing so much out there...at everybody else....and have to face ourselves. We won't find ourselves (our identity) by simply changing from seeking one group's acceptance to that of another group....but by discovering there is One we already belong to...and always will. We belong to the home and heart of our eternal Father who created us."

8. **How can we experience more of that belonging to our eternal Father?**

Ministry: Close in a time of praying for specific needs. Then spend the remaining time, in worship and prayer of thanksgiving for belonging to our heavenly Father.