

Not I But Christ
Galatians 2:15-21

What a storm we had last night...actually it wasn't much of a storm. Most of it went north of us. But I need to make a confession. I was excited for the storm to come, looking forward to it.

Even praying the storm would come.

I love strong weather and I love to be outside in strong weather. I'll go as far as to say the stronger the storm, the more I love it. When we had our 28 inches of snow back in February, I was out in the storm every day—especially when the blizzard was blowing. I love going for walks or runs when it rains. I have known to barbecue during tornado warnings with the rain blowing sideways. I once tried to outrun a tornado, in a Honda, on a two-lane road, in New Jersey, with someone from Oklahoma, the day after I saw the movie *Twister*.

The tornado won the race. But I blame it on my passenger screaming most of the time while I was trying to concentrate on the road.

I love the excitement, the drama, the challenge, and the feeling of the wind and the water and the cold against my skin. Of course, there is a limit. When I feel like I may get hurt, or someone else might or the storm will cause damage or change things somehow, causing me pain, then I get tired of all the fun and go inside.

The storms of life work that way too. We endure all kinds of storms—personally, professionally, financially, storms with our family, storms with our friends, storms with our health and we are usually able to endure those storms well, calm and cool and collected, until one thing happens—the storm threatens to harm us somehow, change us. When the storm moves from outside of us to within us and cause damage, is when we want it all to end.

We live in a stormy time, a time of turmoil. We feel it as a culture, in our families, and as individuals. And it feels stormy and it feels tumultuous because it threatens to wound us, change us somehow, especially how we see ourselves, even how we define who we are. Part of the storm is the constantly evolving definition of sexuality, race, politics, community, family, culture, media, freedom, our country, even Church. It seems like everything is up for grabs.

And its impacting who we believe we are at a basic level—even what it means to be a person.

Let me give you an example. There was an article in the Sydney Morning Herald a couple weeks ago about a scientist and roboticist who was diagnosed in 2017 with motor neuron disease, which is a terminal condition that slowly robs you of all motor function. To prolong his life, He has begun replacing parts of his body with mechanical components. For example, he has given up ever speaking again and now only uses a computer voice. He calls himself Peter 2.0 and he said, “I’m okay with giving up some control to stay alive, although it might change what it means to be human.”

Just this week a young actress who starred in a show of which my wife and I have seen every episode came out as ‘pansexual’ meaning she feels attraction for people regardless of their gender or lack gender definition. She said, “Once I understood my gender was undefined and I could define my gender any way I liked, it made the decision easier.”

A student at Princeton Theological Seminary won a legal victory by refusing to submit to the seminary's antiracism training which mandated he define himself as racist because he is white.

This week as we have watched the terrible human tragedy in Afghanistan, I have heard many people wonder how America defines herself now. Truth be told we have been wrestling with that for some time. So many people aren't sure who we are as a country anymore.

Regardless of how you feel about any of this ethically, we must recognize that we in a cultural storm that seeks to redefine nearly everything about how we identify ourselves and defines who we are. And this storm is wearing us out.

But...if we are followers of Jesus. We have sure and certain anchor in the storm, a place where we can set down amid the wind and the waves. Indeed, the storm cannot touch us because if we are a follower of Jesus, He has defined us. He has given us a timeless, eternal identification that this world cannot touch no matter how much huffs and puffs and threatens and foments.

That's what we are going to talk about in this sermon series for the next few weeks, called "ID'd". as we look at Galatians.

Today we are asking the question, "Who am I?" And we're answering it with this amazing self-defining statement from Galatians 2

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Galatians was written by man led by the Holy Spirit named Paul. He wrote to the Christians living right in the middle of modern-day Turkey called Galatia. And he wrote his letter because the followers of Jesus in Galatia were being misled by false teachers who were attempting to change their identity. These false teachers said that to be a follower of Jesus, the Galatians, who were Celtic people or what we more broadly call Gentiles, had to become Jewish and follow all the laws and customs of being Jewish. These false teachers said you cannot be a follower of Jesus, you cannot be set from sin, unless you do things like not eat shellfish or lift anything heavier than two dried figs on the sabbath or if you were a man you had to be circumcised. In the first few lines of his letter, Paul charged the Galatians to not allow anyone to define their identity other than Jesus:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:6-8

What was the gospel (Gospel is a Greek word that simply means good news) that was being distorted and what was the truth that the Galatians were deserting? And does that truth and that gospel answer the very important question, "Who am I?"

The first thing Paul told the Galatians is we are made right not by what we do, but by what Jesus has done.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:15-16

One of the key words in this passage is justified.

What does it mean to be justified? Justified is a word that Paul used a lot in his writings. Jesus used it too and see versions of it in the Old Testament as well. Justified simply means to be right, to be in the right. Have you ever made a decision that was controversial at the time and then proven right by time? What do we say about that? We say the decision was justified. If someone is absolved of blame for something they didn't do we say they are justified.

A huge part of our identity is what justifies us.

How we prove ourselves and demonstrate we are someone worthy, worthwhile, true, in the right, justified is the great preoccupation of our soul. We desperately want this. Part of being created in the image of God is the spiritual necessity of making sure that I can demonstrate at least to myself and hopefully to others and to God that I am worthy, worthwhile, right, justified. This quest preoccupies our soul to such an extent that how we justify ourselves is usually how we define ourselves.

And the way we tend to think about this, outside of the Gospel, is that I must do something to prove I am worthy. I must do something to justify my existence. A great example of this is one of Gandhi's most famous quotes. He said, "If you want to be loved, be someone worthy of love."

Is that right? Can any one of us ever be worthy of love?

Let me tell you right now, I don't know about you, but I don't consider myself someone worthy of love—especially the love of a holy, righteous, God. I can be selfish. I can be self-centered. I struggle with coveting what others have. I have not always been honest. I have harbored resentment and anger and even hate in my heart. You should see me when we are running late to get the kids out the door to school in the morning or during the 4th quarter of a close football game—especially one we were supposed to win easily.

You would say, "Justified? This guy?"

Not a chance.

Paul said even though I am Jewish and was brought up since the moment I was born that my ability to follow God's law—which for the Jews was 613 commandments—I now know that my ability to follow the law does not justify me. It does not define my life. What does define my life, what does justify me is my faith that Jesus has done that for me. As a Jewish man, Paul would have been familiar with Isaiah talks about our justification like this:

**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.**

Isaiah 53:4-5

Second, Galatians teaches that if we want to live into the identity that Jesus gives us, if we want to define ourselves by Jesus' work rather than ours, there is one thing we must do—stop trying to justify ourselves and prove ourselves through good works.

But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.

Galatians 2:17-19

So, we must die to trying to prove by good works. And instead live to God. And living to God simply looks like cultivating a relationship with God rather than trying to do things, through our own strength and ability and grit, to impress God—or anyone else for that matter. And so we need to define ourselves and identify ourselves through the relationship we have with God rather than anything we might do for Him or anyone else.

Now I admit that sometimes cultivating a relationship with God can look a lot like following the law and doing good works. Cultivating a relationship with Jesus means spending time in prayer and reading the Word and even following the law. And that can look a lot like works.

But here is what matters. Are we doing those things to impress God and earn His love and favor and approval, to justify ourselves and make ourselves right in God's eyes. Or are we doing those things because simply want to please God and show Him our love?

And how can we know?

We can know if we are living to love God or impress God by how we treat other people.

Paul, who wrote these words, knew a whole lot about this very subject. He knew what it meant to pursue God through good works and great deeds and following the law. And he also knew it was a spiritual dead end.

For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Galatians 1:13-14

You see when we live to impress God or others or even ourself rather than love God, we necessarily look for ways to put down other people, to separate ourselves from them, to make ourselves appear spiritually better or morally superior. We find ways to judge, criticize,

belittle, condemn, disparage, guilt and denounce others as less than us because our self-definition is dependent upon proving ourselves better than other people. Implicitly we know we cannot live up to God's standards but we hope that if we are at least better than some people, we may be justified. And when do, our thumb is always on the scale, because there is so much spiritually at stake by our ability to convince ourselves we're better than someone else.

Jesus Himself talked about this very phenomenon:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others.

Matthew 23:1-5

In short, we cannot love God and we cannot love our neighbor if we are trying to live to justify ourselves before God, prove ourselves to Jesus and define ourselves by what we do rather than what Jesus has already done. The more we try to live to impress God, the more God becomes distant and oppressive and a terror and the more we despise our neighbor. So, the more we try to live to impress God, the more unimpressive we become!

But there is a way out. God never lays a burden upon us without saying, “I will carry it for you.”

Galatians promises the way to live into the identity Jesus freely gives us is to make Jesus our identity rather than ourselves.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

I once went on a mission trip to Haiti. It was a very good trip where we spent a lot of time playing with orphans giving the staff at the orphanage a break and making some friends. I had the chance to preach at a church in one of the worst sections of Port Au Prince. When I got the airport to go home, I reached in my bag to grab my passport and it was gone. The rest of the group I was with got on the plane and I was stuck in Haiti. I did the only thing I could which was catch a ride to the American Embassy where I stood outside the gates with thousands of other people, mainly Haitians, trying to get in to go to America. I made my way through the masses up to the front. And I was finally able to get the attention of one of the guards. I told him my story and I asked if he could let me in so I could get home. And he replied, “How can we know you’re American?” I was wearing a Kansas City Royals ballcap, a t-shirt for a barbecue restaurant, cargo shorts and hiking sandals. I stretched out my arms as wide as they would go and I said, “What else am I going to be?”

The guard said, “OK.” He let me in the embassy and I was on a flight back to the United States later that afternoon.

Now, I didn’t set out to look like an American or act like an American or dress to prove I am an American. When I got up that morning, I didn’t say, “Well, I better make sure that

everyone knows I'm an American." It just happened because I have spent 98% of the days I have been given waking up in America. I didn't try to be an American, I just was because its where I spend all my time.

We don't have to try to be like Jesus if He is where we spend all our time. In the end, we wind up looking like or what dominates our attention, our thought-life, our desires, our time the most.

It just sort of happens.

But...do any of us ever choose Jesus willingly?

Do any of us through through good intentions, hard work and persistence, ever develop the kind of faith and trust and hope in Jesus that causes us to say, "Not I but Christ in me?"

Do any of us when life is good, our needs met, the sun is shining and life is all lollipops, moonbeams and rainbows say, "Jesus, I would like to deny myself and follow you."

I know I didn't. And I don't know anyone who has.

And the man whose letter we are studying, Paul, he didn't come to Jesus because he thought it was a good idea. He was just living his best life or so he thought, when Jesus appeared to him and upended his world.

It usually takes a storm for us to submit to Jesus and finally say, "Not I but Christ in me." There is really one reason why we seek to redefine ourselves. It's because we find the old definitions no longer work and the disquiet in our soul forces us to think about ourselves differently.

Friday night at New Life Weekend, a couple hundred of us heard from Rosaria Butterfield. She has an amazing story. She was a secular, radical, anti-Christian college professor, who became a Christian. She became a Christian by sitting around a dinner table hundreds of times with a pastor and his wife and their little community. And she said that dinner at this house looked a lot like the community she had in her home with her secular, anti-Christian community but there was one important difference.

In her community, when all was said and done, all she could really point to give someone hope or minister to them, comfort or serve them, was herself and her own strength. And she found that was not enough. In the pastor's community, they could offer someone greater. They could point offer the God of the Cosmos who loves her enough to give His life as a ransom for her.

And that relationship with Jesus now defines her. You see, in the end, if we end up defining ourselves by who we are and what we have done, rather than by what Jesus has done, we will find out that it is not enough.

When Martin Luther was 22, he was a law student and had no thoughts of becoming a pastor—let alone a man who would reform the Church and launch the greatest revolution in history. He was riding a horse out in the open country traveling from one town to the next, when a sudden and violent thunderstorm popped up. A bolt of lightning knocked Luther from his horse and he promised God that if He saved him, he would become a monk. When Luther got home, he left law school and joined a monastery.

As Christians, we should look forward to the storm. And not the nice, distant, pleasant kind that blows largely to the north. We should pray for the kind that rattles the windows, rocks the house, floods the streets and even knocks us off our horse.

We should pray for the kind of storm in our lives radically redefines who we are and causes us to turn to Jesus and say, “Not I but Christ in me.”