

Good morning, Fellowship. It's good to be with you this morning as we continue our series *Revived*. If you have a Bible, you can turn to Matthew 3.

The summer before my first semester in college I attended the Freshman Retreat. This retreat helped new students get acquainted with the school and with each other. The goal was to make you feel comfortable, welcome, and confident entering your freshman year. Unfortunately, it did the opposite for me. I went home unsure and insecure.

Once I returned home, I told my parents of my apprehension and anxiety. I wasn't sure I had what it took to be independent from my parents – responsible for my own laundry, homework, and working a part-time job. Also, let's be really real – I was 17, 6'0, 125 lbs, and my friends called me Doogie Howser because of how young I looked. I told my parents I was considering staying home to attend good ole Bossier Parish Community College and ditching Ouachita Baptist University.

I was struggling with insecurity. I wasn't sure I could take the next step in my life and be successful on my own. I needed affirmation, direction, and encouragement. When you think about your life, when have you needed that? When have you needed a nudge to press-on? When have you been held back by insecurity or a lack of confidence?

Maybe it was your first day of junior high, high school, or college. Maybe it was a job interview, career change, or the first time you held your son or daughter and thought, "Does this thing come with an instruction manual?" Maybe it was the start of a new relationship or a new business venture. Or maybe, just maybe, there are some of us who struggle with insecurity, confidence, and ultimately with our identity every single day. Every time our feet hit the floor in the morning – our heads hit the pillow at night – and every moment in between there's a struggle to feel confident and secure.

No matter what the situation, we've all had moments where we needed affirmation and ENCOURAGEMENT to move forward. In Matthew 3, we're told about a time that Jesus gets a confidence boost so He could face every trial and circumstance in front of Him.

Matthew 3:13-17: Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Jesus gets baptized by John the Baptist believing it's His Father's will. As Jesus comes up out of the water, the heavens open up – signifying that God the Father is opening up the lines of communication between heaven and earth meaning He wants to reveal something

monumental. Michael J. Wilkins says the monumental moment is: "...the coronation of Israel's Messiah and the commissioning of God's righteous Servant for the work He will now carry out in the power and presence of the Spirit."

In one verse, God the Father affirms His Son and confirms His identity and mission. Verse 17..."and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

For the first time in 400 years, God the Father speaks. He breaks His silence to encourage and empower His Son. These aren't new words, though. He's quoting the Old Testament. The phrase, "This is my Son" is from Psalm 2:7: "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'" The title, "Son of God" possessed Messianic significance. The Messiah would be the anointed or chosen one who would save God's people from their sins. The Father is saying Jesus, His Son, is that Messiah.

Then the phrase, "with whom I am pleased" draws from Isaiah 42:1: "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one *in whom* My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. ²"He will not cry out or raise *His voice*, Nor make His voice heard in the street. ³"A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴"He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law."

By quoting Isaiah 42, God the Father endorses Jesus as the Spirit-empowered Servant who will bring justice to the nations. God the Father is anointing Jesus with an identity and a mission. His identity – the Son of God, the Messiah, the Suffering Servant. The mission – to save His people. He is a chosen and loved Son.

Before Jesus establishes His ministry, He knows He is the beloved Son of a Father who is well-pleased in Him. Before He goes, He knows. In one of his books, Robert Lewis poses the question of what Jesus would consider his finest moment. **"I fully believe he would point to his baptism. Not his role in creation. Not the feeding of the 5,000 or the resurrection of Lazarus. Not even his own resurrection. His baptism...At one of the most critical moments in His life, Jesus needed to hear a word of affirmation from his Father, a hearty word of praise that would buttress His confidence and bolster his courage."**

After some back and forth with my parents, I DID end up attending Ouachita Baptist University. Go Tigers! Sometime during my first semester I had a reflective moment. I had handled all of my new responsibilities – woke up for class on time, showered, went to class, wrote papers, took tests, did laundry and even fed myself. I was crushing it. But I realized, my parents had prepared me for that.

I wrote them a lengthy email expressing my love for them and gratitude for how they raised me. The next day, I got an email back from them and I'll never forget the words my dad shared.

He said, "Richard, most boys grow up wanting to be better than their fathers. They want to provide more, care more, and love more. They want to be able to say, 'I did better than my dad before me.' But I have found myself hoping one day I can be half the man you are."

Talk about life-giving, confidence-boosting, words of affirmation and confirmation. The tears began streaming down my face and I fired off an email back to him telling him, "No! You're the best! I wish I could be half of who you are."

Those words from my father changed me. They spoke truth and identity. They said, "You are a man and you have what it takes. You are going to make it."

Words of affirmation from a father are life-changing. My Father giving me his approval and blessing during one of the most pivotal time periods in my life, as I was ushered into full adulthood, is minimal compared to God the Father declaring His approval for Jesus as His Son. But just as my father instilling confidence and confirming my identity was foundational for me, it was foundational for Jesus as well.

Jesus' identity fueled His life and purpose – so much so, that He frequently re-stated and confirmed it in His own life. In Matthew 12, Jesus re-quotes Isaiah 42 – the same words His Father spoke over Him at His baptism.

16 times in the Gospels Jesus refers to Himself as the "Son of Man." This phrase could be interpreted as "human being." But Jesus was pointing His listeners back to the same phrase used in Daniel 7 – identifying Himself as Messiah and Redeemer.

In the book of John, Jesus uses the phrase "I AM" when referring to Himself. God used this phrase to identify Himself in the Old Testament. It was reserved for Him and in the New Testament Jesus uses it to confirm His identity. He says, "I AM the bread of life, the light of the world, the door of the sheep, the resurrection and the life, the good shepherd, the way, the truth, the life, and the true vine."

At His baptism, His Father says, "Son, you are." And now Jesus says, "I AM." Jesus knew His identity, claimed it, and repeated it.

One more thing about His identity. This wasn't just good self-awareness. He didn't just know about Himself. Jesus knew who He was because He knew Whose He was. He knew He belonged to the Father. He had the Father's love and approval and it propelled Him in fulfilling His purpose.

How did Jesus' identity fuel His life and ministry? In the very next passage in Matthew, the devil comes to tempt Jesus to forego His mission and to take the easy way out. But Jesus knows who He is and rejects the temptation. His identity kept Him going in the right direction. Later, He encounters conflict, persecution, other's attempts to distract Him, false imprisonment, the sickness and death of dear friends, and ultimately death on the Cross. **Because He knew who**

He was, Whose He was, and what He was called to He was able to persevere and push through no matter what obstacles He encountered. His identity motivated Him and kept Him on mission.

The same can be true for us. Our identity in Christ fuels our life and purpose. No matter what we face – political unrest, global pandemics, social pandemics, temptation to sin, job losses, relationship changes because of break-up, divorce, death or conflict, and a host of other adversities that we'll face in this life. Our identity in Christ motivates us. It keeps us going. It gives us the ability to persevere no matter what we face.

The problem for many of us – we aren't or haven't fully leaned into our identity in Him. For many of us, we have placed our identity in things that can be taken, lost, stolen, or die. Placing our identity in the temporal impacts our outlook on life. We can't truly live out our purpose when we find identity in the created instead of the Creator. Our identity can't be in the temporal – things that will perish – things like relationships or the lack thereof. Careers. Degrees. Wealth. Politics. Hobbies and interests. Or other roles we play in life. All of those things will perish.

Placing our identity in things on Earth reminds me of the character "Forky" in *Toy Story 4*. If you haven't seen the movie – it's the latest in the series of movies about toys that come to life when no one is looking. The child in this particular movie anxiously attends her first day of school and there makes a brand-new toy named Forky. He's made from items found in a trash can – a spork, pipe cleaners, a broken popsicle stick, and a set of google eyes. Once Forky "comes alive" he spends the next 20 minutes of the movie trying to return to the trash because he believes that's all he is. He wants to be in the trash because he believes he's trash – that's where his identity lies.

In his final attempt to return to the trash, Forky jumps from a moving vehicle and right before he does, he declares, "I am not a toy. I'm a spork. I was made for soup, salad, maybe chili...and then...the trash. I'm litter!" – Forky

Friends, we aren't Forky. We aren't trash. Our identity doesn't belong here. For those of us who have placed our faith in Christ, we are a new creation. Our identity is in Christ and Christ alone.

So, how do we make sure our identity in Christ fuels our life and ministry? We follow the example Jesus gives us throughout the Gospels. We establish the following rhythm:

Listen to His voice. As soon as Jesus comes out of the water, the first thing He does is He listens to the voice of the Father. But it's not just here. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus stops to listen to the voice of the Father. He, as Kurt shared a few weeks ago, stops to engage in silence and solitude. He intentionally listens to the Father – soaking up every moment in preparation to live out His God-given purpose. Jesus wanted to be and do whatever the Father said. For us, that will require moments of silence and solitude. It will require prayer. It will require opening up

God's Word – seeking to listen to what He says about Himself and us. It's seeking out the words and phrases God says about us because of Jesus.

Believe what He says. If we're going to let the Father's affirmations and approval, our identity, fuel us and revive us then we have to believe that His Words are Truth. We can't rely on our own experiences or our own sin. We can't rely on how we or others have defined us. We must believe His Word and what He says about us. We must embrace the idea that we've been made new and we've been made righteous and reject anything counter to that.

You are not your sin. You are not your past. You are not your experiences. In Christ, God delights in you. You are:

- Loved • Adored • Accepted • Restored • Co-Heir with Christ • Forgiven • Pure • Redeemed
- Righteous • Holy • Son • Daughter • New • Beloved • Chosen • Free • Blameless • Citizen of Heaven • Complete in Christ • The temple of the Holy Spirit

You are not Forky. You aren't meant to be in the trash. You know, if Forky would've just looked at the bottom of his feet, He would've seen that his creator wrote her name there. He had been taken from the trash – not to go back there – but to be claimed, delighted in, and taken on an adventure by his creator. He was stamped with his owner's name and that made him more valuable than anything. And the same is true for each of us. Christ has written His name on our hearts and lives – making us worthy and righteous. That's the Truth and I hope you'll believe it.

Repeat those words to yourself and others. Jesus constantly told others and Himself who He was. If our identity in Christ is going to take root in our lives, we must repeat it. We have to repeat the words and phrases that were just on the screen. And that's my encouragement – my challenge to you today. I want you to pick out one of those words or phrases and claim it. This week speak it into your life over and over again. And then, tell others. **We can tell others who Christ has made us to be, but also who He has made them to be so that we are reminding them of their identity in Christ – giving them fuel for their lives and their ministry.**

This will be a life-long process and no matter where you're at today in your relationship with the Lord, there is more ground to take in fully becoming who He has made us to be and in living out our God-given purpose.

Listen to His voice and what He says about your identity. Believe it. And repeat it so that you might be fueled in your life and in your God-given purpose.