

Who Are You – September 5, 2010

Text: Psalm 100:3

Through the first couple of weeks at Huntingdon, I've been asking my students, "What is God like?" This is the most important question you can ask. Your understanding of God has everything to do with your understanding of self. It is a matter of identity.

This summer was full of news about college football players being suspended because they went to a party hosted by an agent. They allowed fame and the party scene to go to their heads, forgetting the risk they were running with their careers and the damage they might do to their teammates. They forgot who they were.

I also read about a recent fraternity party. The second day of school a kid died binge drinking. Eleven other kids went to the hospital sick. This is an epidemic around the country. We're now seeing lists of the "Top Ten Party Schools" alongside lists to the top academic and athletic schools. Our children do not know who they are because they have forgotten whose they are.

But it's not just college students who forget who they are. We all do things that we know go against the principles we were raised by. Some of it is intentional rebellion. Some of it is carelessness. We need to get back on track and to do that we have to focus on the one thing that life is all about.

Psalm 100:3 "Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture." Everything in life comes down to knowing who you are by understanding whose you are. Identity. Understanding whose you are has everything to do with the decisions you make in your life. When you're tempted, do you give in to your temptations or do you stay focused and do the right thing?

How do you personally make the decision of what is right and wrong? Most people in our culture make the decision by feelings. If it seems right to me or feels right to me, I do it. Now think about that for a minute. If I am my highest force of authority in determining the standard of what is right, then I'm making myself out to be God. That's a pretty shaky foundation to base my life on. Right? We need to know our identity. The Lord is God. It is He who made us. We are His. We are His people. Understanding whose you are has everything to do with who you are and what you become.

It is a matter of ownership. The Lord is God. It is He who made us. Our Creator has a right to make a claim upon our lives. Wouldn't you agree? Think about it for a minute. The Creator made all the stars. Do you know how many stars there are? There are about 10 times as many stars as grains of sand on all the world's beaches and deserts. That figure is a 7 followed by 22 zeros or, more accurately, 70 sextillion stars that are visible. There might be more. Our sun is one of the smallest stars, yet you could fit 1 million Earths into the sun. Everything else in the universe is bigger than this. Now take one handful of dirt and put it under an electron-microscope and there are literally millions of micro-organisms in one handful of dirt. He made you and me in the middle of all of that.

You are a fool if you think you are self-made. The Lord is God. Not you. You are His. King David rarely forgot who he was. He did one time and it cost him big time. After that I don't think he ever forgot again. He wrote Psalm 23 which begins with a statement about identity: The Lord is my Shepherd. Today we would say the Lord is my owner. David knew it is a matter of identity. You understand who you are because you know whose you are. The Lord is my shepherd. We don't like that word 'owner' in reference to ourselves. We resent being owned. But we need to get over it because trying to do things our own way is killing us.

Our current culture is known as the "addicted generation." We're addicted to everything from sex to chocolate. The Bible has a word for what we sophisticated Westerners call addiction: idolatry. Idolatry is the commitment of your spirit to that which cannot bear its weight.

I love to read, but it seems like every time I read a novel I'm reminded that we are a people who idolize romance. Do you remember what a big deal it was when Princess Diana died in 1997? What did Diana really do? She was someone who married the right person, kissed a prince and he became a frog. Got millions of dollars, yet committed adultery and had problems like ordinary people. A week after Diana's death someone else died who was born with millions of dollars but gave it away and gave her life to serving the poor—Mother Theresa. Yet, while the world paid tribute to Mother Theresa there wasn't nearly as big of a deal made then or since. It's because we idolize romance. We all think that if we can find that right relationship, we'd be satisfied. You're single but you're never satisfied. If you could find that right relationship it would satisfy your thirst. Then you get married and you think if I could just get rid of this relationship and find another right relationship.

It's like the Samaritan woman that Jesus met the woman at the water fountain.

This woman had been married 5 times and was living with someone new when she met Jesus. She was thirsty for intimacy. She was placing the weight of her spirit on that which could not possibly bear it up. So Jesus says you keep drinking that kind of water, you're always going to be thirsty, for there is no relationship in the world that is able to bear the weight of your spirit. There's no success in the world that's able to bear the weight of your spirit. I remember asking, why is everyone so enamored with this Princess Diana person? I was told, "Because it's a fairy tale." But it's not a fairy tale that came true. Jesus said, if you drink the water I give you, you'll never thirst again. There is only one that can bear the weight of your spirit: God.

The Bible tells us over and over that God is good, but it still amazes me that God, 70 sextillion stars, a handful of dirt with millions of micro-organisms, the God who did all of that, said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep." – **John 10:11** A God who lays down his life for me and for you? We can trust Him to bear our weights because He loves us that much. God claims you as His own.

Many folks wear crosses that have absolutely no business wearing them. For them, it's just a fashion statement. But if you are a true follower of Christ, wearing a cross can be a great reminder of who you belong to. I have a cross on my wedding ring to remind me who is in charge of my relationship with Renae and that if I ever did anything to violate that relationship my sin would not be just against her, but against God. It reminds me of who I am and whose I am. Some folks get tattoos, a lot of young folks wear purity rings now. It doesn't matter which method you choose, it's a good idea to find yourself something to constantly remind you of who you are and whose you are.

There are no short cuts to living God's life. A lot of people get excited about Jesus, but when things get tough, they drift away. Elridge Cleaver, who used to be head of the Black Panthers, made a decision for Christ, but fell away. Bob Dylan was a devoted Christian, though some thought he walked away. There's some recent evidence that maybe he is still seeking Christ. Most recently, Anne Rice, the author, posted on Facebook that she's quitting Christianity. Even a lot of my friends who began this journey with me have quit. Because we live in an instant society, we want a short cut to God. Microwave Jesus. Just cut to the chase and give me the Cliff Notes version. God, do it for me NOW. When we find this journey is tough we give it up and go looking for something that's easy. There are no short cuts to a relationship with God. There is not a Cliff Notes version to being like Jesus. When people stumble, fall or are tempted and they discover that it is not instant, then they become disillusioned and quit. Hey, this is the hard way, folks. When Jesus Christ invites a man or woman to follow, He invites them to follow on the narrow way, and most folks prefer the big easy. But you're not going to find life on easy road.

There is only one thing that can satisfy your thirst. There is only one thing that can bear the weight of your spirit. Here's the key to life: Not wavering back and forth. Make a lifetime commitment to a long obedience in the same direction. Not, well, this week I think I will and next week I don't know. Make a lifetime commitment to a long obedience in the same direction, because it's about identity. Understanding who you are because you know whose you are.

I've always enjoyed walking around cemeteries because I appreciate the faithfulness and history represented in so many of them. Those graves speak to me out of their silence. They say, "Chris, you're going to die. You are going to be here sooner than you think. So everyday of this precious gift of life you have, remember this one thing - who you are - because you understand whose you are." The Lord is God. He created you. You are His. You are His people, the sheep of His pasture. Make your complete commitment to Him.