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Sermon Series: *Show Me Your ID, No. 6*

Very Good

February 19, 2023

Genesis 1:31 – 2:1 (NIV)

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

Colossians 1:15-23 (NIV)

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

We start in Genesis again this morning: Chapter 1, if you'd like to take a Bible and turn there.

For several weeks now, we've been talking about **identity**. We're doing so partly because it's something every follower of Jesus needs to understand. But we're also doing it in response to the trouble our culture is having in these days trying to figure it out.

Identity.

We've defined it, admittedly simply, as **a person's sense of self and worth**: the essence, the core, of who we are as human beings. That is our identity.

Our American society, in only very recent days, has asserted that *we*, as individuals, have the **ability** to **choose** our identity. I think that's because the technological and democratic underpinnings of our nation have given us the impression that we can do just about anything we like.

But we, here, take issue with that and offer a different, and holistically better, solution.

We maintain that individual persons cannot simply choose their identity.

We have appealed to, frankly, all of human history, both secular and sacred, in claiming that identity is **not** something we can **choose**, but instead, it is something we are **given**—something we are born **with** and **into**.

And in the Judeo-Christian tradition and faith, we get even more specific and say that God Himself—the God of the Bible—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

has given us our identities. God made us and has determined who we are as human beings.

We appeal to Genesis, and, disagree as we might about certain details of its account, we agree together that Genesis is critical in understanding our identity as human persons—in understanding who God is and who we are in relation to Him.

And we find there what the God who made us says about who we are. He says:

1) We are made by God in His own image, the only part of creation that is. This means:

2) We are of tremendous value to God, to the point that:

3) We are ranked above the rest of creation.

Additionally,

4) We are made either male or female.

5) We are intended to grow and develop and even lead the rest of creation, and,

6) We are very good.

That is who God says we are in Genesis 1.

However, we see in **Genesis 3** that, because Adam and Eve **did** what God told them **not to do**, **a change occurred in our identity**. Though God made us to be **good**, because of our **rebellion**, **we are now broken**. We make mistakes, we err in judgment, we are absorbed with self-interest, and we need to be **re-made**—which the God who made us made possible 2000 years ago in the life, death and resurrection of His son, Jesus.

Jesus paid the cost of our rebellion, so that as we will follow Him, our relationship with God can be restored.

1) Made by God in His image.

2) Tremendously valuable.

3) Ranked above all creation.

4) Male or female.

5) Designed to grow, develop and lead.

6) Very good.

7) Broken by sin, but restorable in Jesus.

That's who God says we are, and honestly, if you look at our world today, and if you consider both the beautiful parts and the hard parts—the parts of life that work and those that don't, this word from Genesis is a far more sensible explanation of life than any other that people have ever offered.

It really does take more faith to believe anything else than it takes to believe what God says here about who we are—and what our world is—and why.

Now today, I want to dive a little deeper into just one more of these seven elements of human identity, and that is the sixth: **God created us very good**.

One consistent message we're hearing about what the Lord is doing [in the current Asbury University Outpouring begun February 8, 2023], initially among the

university students and now more broadly, is that He's providing for people a deep sense of peace. When you enter and sit and worship, or even when you walk by, there are things that you might question, there are moments that are strange, there are inconsistencies between persons' responses – yes.

But even many of the critics of what is happening in these days will admit that, though they don't understand it, there is somehow present within a strong sense of calm and tranquility and peace.

And several have suggested, and I tend to agree, that this is a desperately needed thing that the Lord may be giving in these days – *especially* to our younger generations.

Just consider for a minute all they have faced and are yet facing:

- A very troubled state of world powers; many conflicts and threats.
- All the different effects of the COVID pandemic.
- Natural disasters of, it seems, increased number and severity.
- The severe political contentions within our own country.
- The very public challenges to long-held standards of truth from every part of society – even the Church.
- The endlessly competitive and voyeuristic nature of social media, and its addictive nature.
- The disintegration of family.
- The increasing legalization of drugs.
- The moral and spiritual decline in our society.
- The immediate and ever-present access we all now have to everyone else's opinions – whether or not they're wise or informed.

All of that comes on *top* of the increasing weight of sin that our world bears.

You put that all together and what you find is that people, young people especially, are wondering who they are, what they are, what to believe, how to behave, and whom to trust.

To say that the messages they are getting from the prevailing culture are mixed is a dramatic understatement.

So, it is no wonder so many are in counseling, more than ever before in schools and universities across our land, Asbury included.

It's no wonder so many are on medications for depression and anxiety.

It's no wonder so many are questioning the future and if their life means anything.

It's no wonder there is so much angst and anxiety in their spirits.

And so, to me it is no wonder that this is what God is trying to address, here in our midst and in these very days, by offering (no one really knows what to call it, so we'll use the university's language) an "outpouring," and specifically, an outpouring of *peace*.

Now, I know that for many of us [here in Wilmore], the outward effects of God working inside people have been anything but peaceful, right?

But wasn't that true when Jesus came to town 2000 years ago too?

And hasn't that been true every time Jesus shows up in a place?

Schedules upended, questions asked, people inconvenienced. The disciples all dealt with that personally. Imagine the looks on their faces when all those crowds came to Jesus, and He told the twelve of them, "You give them something to eat."

Or, how about Martha's frustration: "Jesus, there's a lot to prepare! Tell my sister to help me!"

Disciples still pay some outward costs. But isn't it worth it for God to work inside people?

Jesus always thought it was.

For many, God seems to be giving an outpouring of peace – which is just like God, you know? To give us exactly what we need the most – in a totally unexpected way and time.

But, let me say, if all this is really from God, you see, it has to be *more than just a feeling* of peace.

God's sort of peace has to be the sort of peace that sets *both* your *heart* and your *mind* at peace.

While God's coming does raise questions, God's sort of peace also answers questions – the very questions that are causing our anxieties.

More and more young people today are asking, "Who am I?"

In response to that, God says, "*You are my much-loved creation.*"

Young people are asking, "What am I?"

God says, "*You're a human being, male or female, and you're way more important to me than anything else.*"

People are asking, "What can I believe?"

God says, "*Believe my word, because I made you and I know you and I love you.*"

"How should I behave?"

God says, "*Live in the way I designed for you to live.*"

"Whom can I trust?"

God says, "*Trust my Son, Jesus, who died for you.*"

Trust my Spirit, who is trying to guide you.

Trust my Word – it's my objective source of truth to you."

And to cap it off, God says – not just to the young among us, but to all who wonder about these sorts of things – right here in Genesis 1, verse 31: "*God saw all that He made, and it was very good.*"

We are a part of the "all," which means *we are very good!*

Again, I say this to all of us, but especially to the young people who are wondering about their worth: *God made you and He has declared you to be very good.*

Please, do not let the world convince you – do not let the world tell you – that you are worthless.

Please, do not be convinced that life is worthless.

Please, do not think that because you don't look a certain way or have a certain talent or wear certain clothes or have a certain boyfriend or girlfriend or husband or wife, do not think that you aren't worth much.

Please, hear the God of the universe, the One who made it all and who made you, hear Him say:

"You—are—very—good."

And when the God who made you says that about you, who cares what anyone else says?

Don't believe the voices of this world.

Don't take your identity in the number of followers you have or the number of likes you get.

Don't think that because your complexion or your body is not like those you see online that you are not worth anything. Don't think that for a minute, because the God who made you and loves you says, *"You are very good."*

Don't ever forget it: you are very good! We are very good. That is what God made us to be. That is our identity.

Now, to be very good in God's estimation does not mean that we're perfect and without need of repair or improvement.

We're not perfect. No one is, but that is the other side of the temptation that is so prevalent in our society, isn't it? To have this arrogance—to have a super-inflated estimation of ourselves.

People tend to think either they're worthless or they're perfect. Those are the extremes the enemy tries to push us toward, but neither is the truth.

"God saw all that He had made and it was very good." Genesis 1:31

At the same time though: *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Romans 3:23.

We're all very good, but we're also all broken in some way.

We are tempted to compare ourselves with people we encounter online. Remember: 1) their images may be enhanced by airbrushing or other electronic means, or even surgery, meaning their appearance is actually fake; and, more importantly, 2) while they might look good, we have no idea what their lives are really like. If we were able to really know them, we would likely discover they are very messed up.

They struggle with all the same stuff.

I saw a documentary about one girl like that just this week. "Online influencer," they called her. She had tons of followers, lived for likes, perfect body, perfect face. But she was completely falling apart inside, both emotionally and physically, but she was hospitalized for depression and anorexia and thoughts of suicide. Even though she had all that on the outside, it wasn't enough to bring her inner peace.

She needed something more.

She needed Someone more.

And we all do.

You see, there's only one person who ever lived who was perfect and without need of repair, and that is Jesus. He's described there in this morning's other Scripture passage. Colossians 1, if you want to turn there.

The Apostle Paul says all this about Jesus—from verse 15 to 20.

- Paul calls Jesus the firstborn of all creation.

- Creation was accomplished in and through Him; He was there with God the father when it all happened.
- Paul says all things hold together in Him.
- He says Jesus is the Head of the Church.
- He's the firstborn from the dead; the first one not to get stopped by it, but to go on through it.
- Paul says that Jesus is supreme over all things.
- In fact, God's fullness dwells in Him such that in His death and resurrection, God was able to reconcile all of the brokenness—the broken parts, the parts of creation that had rebelled against Him; Paul says God was able to bring all of that back, and to restore it all to the way it used to be.

All because of Jesus; all through Jesus.

You see, Jesus can re-make us. Jesus can re-make us into who God intended us to be from the beginning.

Now, even as we are, just because of who we are, we are still very good—intrinsically good in God's eyes. Very valuable. Very important. Very much loved. "For God so loved the world..." (John 3:16).

God makes no junk.

But Jesus can make us, really make us, truly good again.

He can take away our brokenness and all the doubt and worry and anxiety that goes with it.

Look there at verse 21: Paul writes, *"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your own minds because of your evil behavior."*

The brokenness that we all suffer from, the brokenness that happened to humanity in Eden? Paul is telling us here that it even affects how we think about ourselves, how we value ourselves, how we're given to comparing ourselves to others, you see?

What happened in Eden to our forebears affects us way more than we know.

But Paul goes on. He writes in verse 22, *"But now..."*

Ah, something has happened; something's changed, you see? *"But now—God has reconciled you by Christ's—death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."*

You see, God sent Jesus to restore us. That's how important we are to Him.

God doesn't want us constantly worrying and anxious and self-conscious.

God doesn't want us comparing ourselves to others and thinking thoughts that we're not good enough or we're not worth anything—or that life is not worth living.

Those are broken self-perceptions.

That is a false human identity, and God sent Jesus to repair it. He sent Jesus to do away with those lies that our enemy tries to convince us of.

That's part of why Jesus came: to restore in us that part of our identity, so we know that we are, in God's eyes, very good.

That's not arrogance. That's not conceit.

That's simply who we are.

So how do we get there? How does that repair happen?

We trust Jesus with ourselves, and I mean *really trust Him* – with *all* of ourselves.

We hold nothing back from Him.

Paul says it back in verse 22: *“God has reconciled you by Christ’s... death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and if you do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.”*

You see, right perception of self, healthy identity: it’s all in giving ourselves, and following, and holding tight to Jesus. That’s how we get back to “very good,” and that’s how we get back to peace.

Are you doing that? Are you holding tight to Jesus?

Are you continuing in your faith?

Are you not moving from the hope offered in Jesus?

Or, are you sliding away – listening to the world’s voices?

Those are questions we all have to answer, and we can only answer for ourselves, but I’ll tell you that’s the only way to healthy identity. It’s the only way out of the constant comparing of ourselves to others.

It’s the only way to peace.

Do you need that?

Do you want that?

Release from jealousy and resentment and anxiety?
Do you want to really become who God made you to be?

Jesus is the way.

Closing Prayer: Father, help us to see two things here this morning, would You?

Help us to see the truth of who *You* say we are.

And help us to see the lies that the world tries to tell us about ourselves for what they are.

And then help us to believe You and choose You and Your way, and to choose Jesus, Your Son, always, at life’s every point of decision, so that Your Spirit might complete the work You’ve started in us and so we might be people of deep, deep peace: peace with You, peace with those around us and peace with ourselves.

Lord, if there is even one here this morning who still needs to sense that peace of knowing that they are Yours, would You speak that deeply into their heart right now. And maybe there are others who are searching for peace in some specific area, in some specific way, Lord, would You show them that way. Amen.

Closing Song: *Like a River Glorious*

Benediction