



Whose Adventure?

Thomas Rho
Vienna Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 2:1-10

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Please join me as we read a passage that is more explosive and exciting than the greatest fireworks show ever: Ephesians 2:1-10. I am so grateful to have this privilege to preach God's Word today. Would you pray with me: "God, thank you for your Word. Help me to preach faithfully. Amen."

Ephesians 2:1-10 sums up the Good News of Jesus Christ. And this is the good news according to one Christian rapper: the story of the hero dying for the villain.

But that's not all. In Ephesians 1, Paul adds that not only did the hero die for the villain, but through the hero's sacrifice, the villain is adopted into the family of God.

We meet every Sunday to declare and delight in this good news. We meet weekly to revel in the immeasurable riches of God's grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

And we do this at least once a week because we are forgetful. We easily forget the good news, in large part because there are forces and voices that constantly draw our attention elsewhere. In our passage, Paul describes the three forces. They are the surrounding culture, a supernaturally powerful evil force, and an inner inclination towards evil. All of these forces have one objective: to make

us find our identity in something other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What do I mean by identity? Identity is how we primarily define ourselves. Identity is the answer to the question: What is the source of, or the primary way, we get a sense of self and worth?

All of us find our identity in something.

As a Korean-American, I have lived in two worlds that derive identity in different ways. As a Korean, my identity was rooted in bringing honor to my family and living up to my family's expectations. I gained a sense of worth when I did something that made my parents proud. For those who don't know, many Koreans elevate education over pretty much everything. So I felt like I mattered when I was able to come home with a report card full of A's. On the flip side, I would feel terrible if I got a B. I can't tell you how many times I broke down in tears when I received a test back that didn't have an "A" on it.

Now the American side of me preached a different way to find identity. Unlike Asian culture, which is family-focused, Western culture finds identity in the individual. Popular phrases in an individualistic culture are, "I do me" and "you do you." There is a belief that I am the judge who determines who I am. In our individualistic

culture, we determine the expectations and rules for ourselves. This sounds good, but to think that an individual alone has the power to determine his or her identity is an illusion. We see that in the first three verses of Ephesians 2; there are external and internal forces that influence us to find our identity in something other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, for many of us, our identity, our sense of self and worth come from our achievements. This is particularly true of people in Northern Virginia. If you had to use one word to describe the majority of people in Northern Virginia, what would it be? My answer: *driven*. Many of us are compelled to achieve. We eat, sleep, and breathe progress and success. We are constantly striving for the next thing because many of us get a sense of self and worth in our achievements. What we do is who we are. Our grades define us. Our jobs define us. The political party we support defines us. What we do is who we are.

As someone who has worked as a private tutor, I saw firsthand how getting into UVA or a Top-25 college defined my students' sense of worth. This goal drove some of my students to sleep on average only four to five hours per night. Some students, who couldn't keep up, were afraid or ashamed to tell their friends which schools they were applying to because they weren't one of the top schools.

But we don't solely find our identity in what we achieve at school or at our jobs. We also find our identity in what we do at church. Some of us define our identity by the titles we have at church. We base our sense of worth on what ministry we serve, how much of the Bible we know, or how much less we sin than the person sitting next to us.

I confess that I struggle with finding my identity in ministry. I, at times, get the greatest sense of worth when I preach a "great" sermon or receive praise from a member of the church.

The problem with finding our identity in our achievements is that it's like building a house on sand. It is unstable and unreliable, and eventually, it will crumble.

Think about it. What happens to our sense of self and worth when we can't achieve what we used to or expect ourselves to? What happens when we can't get A's anymore or make varsity? What happens when we retire? What happens when we can't afford that bigger home or a new car? What happens when we can't be the parent we dreamed of being? Perhaps we will find another achievement to define ourselves, but in doing so, aren't we repeating a process that will leave us wanting?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ gives us an infinitely better way. When we define our identity by our grades, our jobs, or our moral behavior, we base our identity on what we achieve or fail to achieve. The gospel of Jesus Christ, on the other hand, gives us an identity that is not earned, but rather, freely given. Pastor Tim Keller says that in Christianity, identity is received, not achieved.

And that is what we see in Ephesians 2:1-10.

God doesn't save any of us because we deserve it. He didn't look at our achievements and deem us worthy. We were dead in our trespasses and by nature, children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. We were worthy of judgement and condemnation for our sins. But the story doesn't end at verse 3.

Paul starts verse 4 with "But God." Oooh, let's go. Read Ephesians 2:4-10.

I know we are a Presbyterian church, but can I get a Hallelujah?! This is good news y'all!

God, being rich in mercy, gives the dead new life. He makes sinners into saints!

In Christ, we are given a new identity. It is received, not achieved. Jesus achieved it. Again, the story of salvation is not about how the villain reformed himself, but how the blameless hero died for the condemned villain, so that the

villain can have a new identity. And that new identity is *beloved*. The condemned becomes a child of God.

Every other way in which we find identity requires us to follow the rules to give us a stable sense of identity. Get good grades, vote for this party, don't commit that sin, and you'll be accepted, you'll have worth. In Christianity, we are given a stable sense of self and worth by what Jesus has achieved, and then we follow His rules.

Finding our identity in Christ is truly freedom. It means that my sense of worth doesn't rest on what I do. We will be free from the emotional highs and lows of achievement. When we do something great we don't get a bloated sense of self. When we don't get the grades we wanted, or failed to get the promotion at work, it hurts, but we aren't devastated.

Finding our identity in Christ also frees us from comparison. I often find that when we define who we are by what we do, we look around to gauge how we are doing. Our sense of worth fluctuates based on whom we're around. We feel less valuable when the people around us are more skilled, have more degrees, better paying jobs, or more followers on social media. But when our identity is in Christ, we are free from comparison because the God of the Universe, the One whose opinion matters infinitely more, looks at us and calls us beloved. And this identity also frees us from seeking validation from those around us. It

frees us to love people with no strings attached. We don't do things so that people can affirm the ways we find our identity. We don't look at the number of likes on Facebook or Instagram to get a sense of worth. We don't serve people to be praised or recognized. We are free.

At this point some of us might be thinking: this all sounds nice, but it doesn't really matter that God loves me. I encourage you to ask God to make Himself known to you. Also ask someone in the church to pray for you. Knowing God is the greatest joy in life.

For others who believe in God, but are forgetting your identity in Christ, I encourage you to read Ephesians 2 this week. Read it over and over again. Think about the wonderful truths in this chapter and pray that God would help you to find your identity in Him every day.