

Identity Theft

I Just Have To Be Strong

Video: *Lonely People*, Igniter Video

Just so you know, those people in the vignettes weren't actors. They were the actual people who are going through what you read on the screen.

We all know it, life can be real hard. How are we going to make it when we hit those unexpected bumps in the road of life, or maybe we should say, when they hit us?

This morning we're beginning a new series we're calling Identity Theft. Now, we're all familiar with the threat of personal and financial identity theft. The figures aren't out yet for 09 but in 2008 there were almost 10 million victims of identity theft in the US. That's an amazing 22% increase from 2007!

That kind of identity theft hits us financially. But this morning I want us to focus on an even more insidious form of identity theft.

According to the Bible, when we realize that we're sinners before a holy and righteous God, and then trust Jesus Christ as God's provision for forgiveness, we're born again. Jesus Himself said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* (John 3:3)

The Bible says by faith we pass from death to life, are made children of God, and the God the Holy Spirit comes to take up residence in our bodies. "Born again" implies a radical change. We become citizens of heaven.

If you heard Neil's message last week, this was point. Because we're raised up spiritually, we are more than conquerors when it comes to dealing with sin.

Those are spiritual truths. But the Bible tells us something else too. It tells us about one called Satan or the Devil. A lot of people joke about the existence of Satan but Jesus never did. Jesus was absolutely serious when it came to this one who is called the accuser, the adversary, and the evil one.

In John 10:10 Jesus drew a crucial contrast between His agenda and Satan's. We're going to use this verse throughout the next 4 weeks as our main reference point.

This is what He said, *The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*

The objective of Christ and Satan couldn't be more antithetical. Jesus Christ is about eternal life when we die and meaningful life while we're walking the planet.

Satan is about deception and destruction.

I was at a conference a few weeks ago and one of the speakers told about something they did as a church staff to build unity. He pastors a rather large church with a pretty big staff so he broke them into 2 teams and they did an ongoing version of capture the flag.

Well, one day one of the guys from the opposing team came really early in the morning and hid in the pastor's closet. He was going to listen to see if he could hear the hiding place of the day for the flag.

He was discovered so the pastor's team slammed the door and leaned a chair against it so he couldn't get out. After a while he stated saying, "Ok guys, you can let me out now." He kept it up so eventually they quietly removed the chair that was holding the door.

You know he stayed in that closet for a couple of hours whining cause they wouldn't let him out when all he had to do was turn the door knob and walk right out.

He believed something that was not true and it imprisoned him. Here's the principle.

I. A Lie Believed As Truth Will Affect You As If It Were True

A lie that we believe is true, even though it's completely false, will have the very same effect on us as it would if it were true.

Turn to John 8 Page 948

In John 8 Jesus is in a rather heated discussion with the religious leadership of his day.

Read verse 39a They were saying because we're Jews, because we're descendants of Abraham, that makes us right with God.

Read 39b-41a Jesus said, there's more to it than just your family tree. If you were Abraham's descendents in a spiritual sense you'd act like he did. You wouldn't be trying to kill Me.

Read 41b They said, we're not illegitimate. Your mother was pregnant before she married Joseph! God's our father.

Read 42-44

You know those picture of Jesus where he's pale and thin and kind of wimpy? That was not the Jesus of the Bible. He was tough. He could be filled with grace and mercy when He served people.

But when He had to speak up for truth He could be as tough as nails. He certainly didn't mince any words with these guys, did He?

By the way, He wasn't a blond haired, blue eyed, white guy. He was a person of color. Jesus was an olive skinned, dark haired and dark eyed Palestinian with muscles in His arms and callouses on His hands from years of carpentry.

What I want us to see though, is what He said about Satan. *...he is a liar and the father of it.*

This morning we're going to unpack one of the most common lies that our spiritual enemy wants us to believe. He wants to rob us of our realization of our identity in Christ and convince us that we just have to be strong.

He wants us to believe that when the twists and turns and speed bumps of life hit us that we have to have it all together, that it all depends on us, that we have to shoulder the weight of what ever we're facing.

That's a lie, but remember, *a lie believed as truth will affect you as if it were true.*

What are some areas that we mistakenly believe all depend on us?

How about emotionally? Inside we feel weak and vulnerable but we think, "I can't show it. I have to be emotionally strong for my kids, for my parents, for my marriage, whatever. It's on my shoulders. And if I can't keep it together, these people who depend on me won't make it or they'll think less of me."

Even pastors call fall for that one. "This church depends on me. I can't let down my guard and let my congregation, or my elders, or my staff know my weaknesses and fears. The success of this church depends on how strong I am."

Here's another. You might call this area the "perfect parent syndrome." "Everything I do, everything I say, has to be precise and exactly the way the parenting books say because how my kids turn out rests entirely on my shoulders. If I'm the perfect Christian parent my children will always follow the Lord." I have to believe we have some people here who can identify with that.

What are some other areas? Think about this, we can believe the lie that it all depends on us spiritually.

"My husband isn't a Christ follower so I have to be perfect or he won't ever believe in Jesus. I have to say the right words, pray the right prayers, know all the spiritual answers. I have to keep up the illusion of being spiritually strong because if people knew the real me God couldn't work in their lives."

Now don't misunderstand. I'm not saying that we don't have responsibilities in life. I'm not saying that we should ignore our responsibilities, spiritual or otherwise. But there's a major problem if you and I are doing life under the delusion that it all hinges on us, that we're indispensable.

The bottom line is this, I don't care how strong you are, your strength has limits. Eventually you run out.

I have to believe that there's some of you here today who's strength is just about tapped out.

I. A Lie Believed As Truth Will Affect You As If It Were True

II. The Truth, Properly Understood, Will Set You Free

Lets go back to John 8. That was page 948 if you closed your Bible.

Read verses 28-30

In verse 28 when Jesus said, *When you lift up the Son of Man*, He was referring to the cross. He says when that happens then you'll know that I am.

When Moses met God at the burning bush and God commanded him to go back to Egypt to lead his fellow Jews out of slavery Moses asked God "When they ask, who should I say sent me?"

Here's God's answer: "*I AM WHO I AM.*" And He said, "*Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'*" Exodus 3:14

The covenant name of God for Israel was Jehovah. Jehovah comes from the Hebrew verb *hayah* which is the verb for "to be." Three times in Exodus 3:14 the verb *hayah* is translated "I am."

The Jews used the phrase "I am" to refer to God. When Jesus said "When you lift up the Son of Man you'll know that I am," He was saying "I'm God."

You say, "Wait a minute Ed, it says you'll know that I am *he*." That's true but if you'll notice the word "*he*" is in italics.

If you're reading in NIV it says, *you will know that I am the one I claim to be*. Again, notice the words *the one I claim to be* are in italics. That's the translators letting you know they added them. Those words aren't in the original.

The Jewish leaders knew exactly what Jesus meant when He called Himself "I am."

Read verses 58-59

They were going to stone Him to death for blasphemy!

Now put this all together and Jesus is saying "I'm divine. I'm the Son, the Second person of the trinity. But The Father sent me and I only do and say what He has directed. He hasn't left me alone. He's always with me."

The Savior who is with God and is God lived out a perfect human life of dependence on the Father. He came to be our Savior through His death and resurrection, but He also can to model what it looks like when a human being totally and unreservedly depends on the Father for life.

Read verses 31-32

During my earlier years of life I believed a lie. Maybe some of you are still at this point spiritually. I believed that God wanted to hold me back from enjoying life. I believed He was anti-happiness. He wanted to impose all of His laws and rules on me to suppress me. To shackle me.

Then I found out the truth. When you know the truth it liberates you. I found out that God wanted me to experience life in a fuller way than I could have ever imagined.

His commands don't repress me. They let me really live the way I was created to be.

Now follow this. Jesus *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* Philippians 2:6-7 NIV

The Son of God took on humanity and submitted Himself to the Father, even going to the cross. How did He do it? See, He had a human body just like you and me. He got hungry, thirsty, and tired. He had feelings and emotions. He wept. He felt the pain of rejection. He felt the physical pain of the cross.

In His humanity He only made it through because he knew the Father was with Him. And He knew the Father well enough to know what He wanted. Jesus even could speak the words the Father would speak.

Jesus said it so clearly. He said, *I do nothing of Myself.*

The lie that puts us in bondage is the lie that we have to be strong. That we have to be able to handle it all. The evil one robs us of our true identity as children of God, one with the Father.

The truth is, that just as Jesus, in His humanity, had to live out oneness with the Father, so do we. And when we do we're set free.

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II. The Truth, Properly Understood, Will Set You Free

III. To Succeed We Have To Acknowledge Our Weakness And God's Strength

When we first moved into the home we live in now our children were young and so my wife says, "Let's get an above ground pool for the backyard."

Sounds good to me so we found a used pool for sale in the Pennysaver and snatched it up. Knowing nothing about pools, I set out to put this thing up in the back yard.

The first order of business was to level out a big area for the base. I went out there with my trusty shovel and started to dig. That ground felt like it was sheet of granite. I could hardly get the tip of the shovel into it, let alone smooth out an 18 foot circle. Fortunately I had a friend with a backhoe and a dump truck. You know what? That backhoe didn't have a bit of trouble scooping up my rock-hard dirt.

Same dirt. Same yard. Different power.

Life can be rock hard, can't it? We get out there with the little shovel of our own abilities to try to tackle the job. We get sore muscles. We get blisters on our hands. The tip breaks off of the shovel. And all the time our Heavenly Father is sitting there with the motor idling on the backhoe and we don't even know it. We're clueless.

Turn to Isaiah 40 Page 639

Read verses 25-26

Who is like God? Look up at the stars. He created every one. He even knows them by name. Scientists estimate that there are 10^{24} stars in the universe. That's 10 with 24 zeros behind it. We don't even have a name for that big a number and God knows every star by name. That's how big He is.

Read verse 27

Why do you think that your problem, your cause, your family, your job, your life isn't God's concern? He's got 10^{24} stars that He knows by name. Implication? He's well aware of you and your needs.

Read verses 28-31

Don't you get it? In the midst of all those stars you're infinitesimally small. But He is absolutely huge. He doesn't have an equal.

Now look at this. Turn to II Corinthians 12 Page 1032

The author of these verses is an Apostle named Paul. God used him to pen 1/2 of the New Testament. He worked amazing miracles through Paul. He had visions of heaven itself.

That could make a guy kind of proud. Paul might begin to think he's pretty special for God to be using him in building the kingdom. In fact, he might begin to figure that he's better than those common garden variety Christians. So God did something.

Read verse 7

We don't know what this thorn in the flesh was that God allowed in Paul's life. There's been a lot of guesses. From things that he says in other places I believe it was a disfiguring eye disease.

What do you do when trouble comes? You pray. **Read verses 8-10**

he prayed. In fact he prayed over and over that this thing would go away. God always answers prayer and one of the ways He answers at times is to say no.

Notice, when we're weak and we tap into God's strength then we're really strong. God loves to work through weak, imperfect, feeble people to get His work done. That way He gets the worship and honor.

If we have trusted Christ as Savior our life is about doing His work. Whether it's doing our job, or parenting our kids, or ushering at church, or being a good neighbor it's all God's work.

Paul could say, *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities*. The Contemporary English Version translates it, *Yes, I am glad to be weak*.

I'm glad to be weak because then life becomes more about God and less about me. I'm glad to be weak because then that's what makes me pray more. It's what puts God at the center of my life's focus.

I'm glad to be weak because then I can get out of the way and let God in to operate the backhoe.

Here's a question for all of us here this morning. What weakness do you need to take

pleasure in? What infirmity, what impairment, do you need to welcome and embrace today?

I look at my own life and if I'm not careful I can begin to buy into the lie. At certain points in church ministry it just seems like all kinds of problems and challenges converge at one time. And in those stressful times if I'm not careful I can begin to think, what am I doing here? I don't have every answer to every problem. I can't change people's hurtful situations.

Are we doing church in the most effective way to serve the greatest number of people? Is there some area of leadership the I'm failing in?

Nothing wrong with evaluation. Nothing wrong with trying to improve what were doing as a church. But what is wrong is when I start saying to myself I can't. I don't have all the answers. I don't have every leadership skill. I, I, I.

That's where Satan wants us to live. He wants to rob us of who we really are and the source of all wisdom and power. He wants us to get caught up in our weakness without then turning it over to God.

I believe the key is found in the answer God gives Paul in verse 9. *My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*

Let's try to walk our way through that verse. "Grace" is God's undeserved mercy. The word "sufficient" is a translation of the word *arkeo*, which is often translated "be content." The word translated "strength" is the Greek word *dunamis* from which we get the English word "dynamite."

The word translated "perfect," *teleioo* means "to bring to an end, to complete." And finally "weakness" is a translation of *astheneia*. *A* means "not." *Sthenes* means "strong." There a disease called Myasthenia Gravis, meaning "serious weakness."

Putting that all together Craig Groeschel comes up with this paraphrase: God's divine influence is exactly enough to meet your every need because His explosive power is made completely perfect when you are broken before Him.

Satan wants to confuse you into thinking that you can do it all. He promotes the philosophy that says you can handle it. In fact, if you can't you must be a loser.

Satan does everything within his power to keep the focus of our attention, trust, worship, and concern turned inward. He wants our highest priority to be ourselves. I have to do it. What are people going to think of me? How can I keep going when the truth is I don't have it in me?

God says, "Of course you don't have it in you. You're weak. Embrace the truth of your weakness so that I can display my awesome power."

Grace hits at the very root of pride. God giving us mercy when we don't deserve it humbles us. But you know, grace can also be a stumbling block. Just like Satan whispers in a believer's ear, "It's all up to you," he says the same thing to those who aren't believers yet.

He says, "Coming to God, being part of God's family, receiving forgiveness, receiving new life, that's also something that you can do. So try your best, go to church, obey the 10 commandments, stay out of trouble and you'll be fine. Live right and God will accept you. He has to, He's a loving God and a loving God wouldn't send anyone to hell."

If there was another way Jesus wouldn't have humbled Himself to become one of His creation. If there was another way the Father wouldn't have subjected His Son to the brutal death of the cross.

We begin by grace, God's undeserved favor. *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* (Romans 5:1-2)

A perfect God forgives imperfect people by grace. How do we get there? What's the access point to get to God's grace? It's faith.

That's all that we can do to establish a relationship with a perfectly righteousness and holy God. What we can do, what we must do, is step through that door of faith.

The best you know how, today, trust Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross. Then you can know that your forgiven and then you can know that God Almighty will be with you, perfecting His strength in the midst of your weakness.