

Identity leads to Authority

Galatians 3:23-29

Matthew 4:1-11

Today we continue to focus on discipleship and particularly understanding that our identity in Christ - and accepting that identity - leads to authority.

Again, if you've missed any of the themes that we've been focussing on, you can catch-up by clicking on the website or the e-notices and downloading the sermon text.

I'm hoping that you can begin to see that, although we have separated out these themes of discipleship, actually they are interlinked, one depending on the understanding and acceptance of the other. The focus that is clearly emerging, I hope, is that these themes aren't static. It's not the case that once you've looked at them that's it, they are ticked off, but rather they are themes that demand growth. They are areas we can grow into and as we grow into them, we grow as disciples. So, as we grow in intimacy, we will grow in our understanding of God's affirmation. As we allow God's affirmation to grow in us, we will see a growing sense of knowing/accepting our identity - who we are in Christ. And today, we will see that as the sense of identity as sons and daughters of God grows, we will grow into the authority God entrusts to us, Discipleship isn't static, but enables growth.

And so we turn to our reading for today as we focus on enabling our identity to grow authority.

Identity is crucial - knowing who we are (children of God) is the source of genuine authority. And Paul reminds the Galatians that our standing before God comes from our identity as his children.

We don't work for or earn that authority, we need to take it up simply because of our identity as God's sons and daughters.

Paul talks about 'adoption to sonship'. Those to whom Paul was writing would have been familiar with the ceremony when the father determined that the time had come for the child to be recognised as an adult, with all the rights, powers and privileges of being a son - and heir to the father's wealth and status. If this ceremony was performed for someone outside of the family - what we usually call adoption today - then not only did they become an heir, see a change in their legal status, but their obligations from their old life were cancelled. A fresh start as heirs of the father.

This adult son now becomes legally empowered to act in the father's business. The father affirms the son as someone who carries his authority. We saw this in action when we focussed on Jesus' baptism and the words of the father: "This is my son, whom I love. Listen to him." Authority has been conferred.

As we grow in our identity as sons and daughter of God, we also grow in our willingness to take up the authority of the father which is ours as his heirs. He invites us to join the 'business' and sends us out with that authority. And as we join the family, we also understand that the relationship between father and son is one that is not just love, but also one of trust. He trusts us to work with him for the extension of his kingdom here on earth.

We don't need to strive for that place in the family and the authority that comes with it, we need to simply accept who we are (sons and daughters of Christ) and pick up the authority that goes with it.

What an amazing image we are building up of our relationship with God, our relationship as disciples - heirs, co-workers of the kingdom - not something that we can earn, but something that we must take up because of who we are in God.

But when we look at the account of Jesus tempted in the wilderness, we see clearly how the devil works to try and prevent the authority being taken. Satan, as he tempts Jesus to mis-use his authority, tempts Jesus by questioning his identity. "**IF** you are the son of God..."

But as disciples, we follow Jesus example as our identity is questioned. We don't need to use our authority to prove our identity. But rather we must grasp our identity in order for us to pick up our God-given authority. Jesus knew who he was and didn't need to prove it through turning stones into bread, throwing himself off the temple or worshipping Satan. It's identity that leads to authority, not the other way round.

Unless we fully grasp our identity, we'll never be able to fully pick up our authority that comes with that identity. If we don't fully pick up that authority, then we will never be the most effective we can be in building God's kingdom here on earth.

So when our identity or our authority is questioned, we need to remember and claim the promises written within Scripture:

"Now you are no longer a slave, but God's own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you."