

I might have titled this sermon “The Born (B-O-R-N) Identity.” If you like spy movies Matt Damon starred as a government secret agent in a suspense thriller titled, “The Bourne (B-O-U-R-N-E) Identity,” a top-notch spy movie, filled with action, suspense, and a mystery that is slowly explained as the movie goes on. As the movie opens we see this agent floating out on the water, appearing to be dead. A fishing boat happens by and picks him up, unconscious. When he finally comes to he realizes that he has no idea who he is. He spends the rest of the movie trying to discover his “identity.” I could elaborate on the rest of the plot but, suffice it to say that the whole movie hinges on this man’s quest to discover his true identity.

In our world today many people have done the same thing; they have lost their identity. This is a very serious thing because when a person loses their identity, they lose their self-worth, their self-esteem, their self-confidence. And when they lose their identity, their self-worth, their self-esteem and their self-confidence, they begin to look to someone or something to fill that void. They are no longer confident in who they are and who God made them to be.

Of course, even Christians can fall into an identity crisis. You see, I used to be convinced that when we looked at bad situations we should see them as a sin issue, which sometimes they are because our sin is why Jesus came into this world. Yet the root of many personal problems is often an identity issue. Often before issues become sin issues, they are issues of “identity” and “belonging.”

After a person is in a full blown “identity crisis” the temptation to sin becomes practically unbearable. People search for someone or something to fill the emptiness in their lives. That’s why Christian husbands leave their wives, and Christian wives leave their husbands. They no longer have an understanding of their identity in Christ. Satan begins to lie to them and says, “You know you’re not appreciated; you deserve better than this.” He begins to appeal to their ego, due to a lack of self esteem and Godly self worth. Their confidence is shattered because they cannot see themselves as God sees them, and they begin to

believe a lie that something better is on the other side of the fence. They're not satisfied or content with who they are and before long Satan dangles a carrot in front of them. This carrot is self-gratification and self-indulgent behavior.

It's for this same reason that teenage boys and teenage girls give in to sexual pressure. It's usually not about sex itself; it's about acceptance. You want me; therefore, I must be loved. I am loved; therefore, I am accepted. I am accepted; therefore, I must be somebody.

But Christian friends, what we need is a “B-O-R-N Identity.” What is a “BORN Identity?” Jesus receives his at his baptism. *It is made clear who he is and to whom he belongs.* If you are baptized it should be clear to you too.

Who is Jesus Christ? Mark chapter one begins to give answers to these vital questions. *“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:9-11).

In this Scripture there is a remarkable thing that happens to Jesus immediately following his baptism. Without missing a beat, the same Holy Spirit who lighted on Jesus' head like a gentle dove in verse 10 transforms into a far fiercer bird in verse 12 that grips Jesus in its talons and flings him out into a desert wasteland.

The typical English translation that the Spirit “sent” Jesus to the wilderness is a pretty weak rendering of a Greek verb that literally means *to throw, to expel, to hurl someone with force.* The Spirit picks Jesus up like some bouncer at a nightclub and throws him through the front window. When Jesus picks himself up and dusts himself off, he finds himself in an ugly, spiritually dangerous place—in the company of the devil out in the middle of the wilderness, the biblical symbol for all that is wrong with this fallen creation in its isolation from God.

That's just what we would *not* expect as we pivot from verses 10-11 to verse 12. After all, Jesus is no sooner baptized than God immediately showers him with love and favor. But if there's any question as to the nature of this particular anointing, it becomes immediately evident: when the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and God expresses his love for him. But the first order of business is a blunt, brutal engagement with evil. Why was Jesus baptized and, furthermore, anointed by God? It certainly wasn't step one to a comfortable life of fame and glory. "*He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him*" v. 13). The animals in question here aren't squirrels and bunny rabbits—they're threats to human life: lions, jackals, and other predators.

In the Bible the wilderness is shorthand for chaos, the precise opposite of the cosmos God created "in the beginning." God was careful to carve out a safe haven where life could flourish undisturbed and unthreatened; but in chaos threats to human life slip out of place and life becomes precarious. When Jesus shows up order follows. Even so, precisely because Jesus is the Christ, the true *Son of God*, his first order of business is to engage evil, to go to the places where ministry is most needed.

As we journey through 2021 we too have been called to be like Christ to this world. So where should this new identity lead us? Are you baptized? Then these words are meant for you too: "*You are my Son (or my Daughter), whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" That is who we are and to whom we belong!

Coming to God isn't confining. It's liberating! Now you are free to be the real *you* than you ever were before. You don't have to follow the latest fads and trends, whims and ideas of people. A baptized child of God is free to be who God made you to be. You don't have to go out and get wasted with your friends to be accepted. You don't have to wear the same hairstyle or the same brand of clothing in order to fit in.

As long as it's of God and it's not incompatible with the Bible's teaching, you are free to be you. Because you have now come to the place of understanding

that your *identity* is in Jesus Christ. Now the Father is the one you want to please because he loves you so much and he looks with favor upon you!

We must begin to understand who we are in Christ. We must begin to get our approval and our acceptance from him. We must reverse the habit of letting the Deceiver tell us we are nothing because of the failures of our past or the weaknesses of our present. We must begin to see ourselves the way God sees us. You see, when we begin to understand his love and grace, we begin to understand our identity.

When researching this sermon, I came across an author that has a very interesting take on this Scripture passage in Mark 1. He says, “Just as Israel had their Red Sea baptism, so Jesus is baptized in the waters of the Jordan. Just as the people spent forty years in the desert, so Jesus is driven to remain in the wilderness forty days, struggling with temptation. Just as the people enter the promised land, so Jesus announces that God’s kingdom has come near, and he invites his listeners to enter it through repentance and belief.” He says that “These three Old Testament stories become alive in a new way when Jesus hears the heavenly voice naming him as the Son who is loved. In him these stories find unexpected fulfillment” (© 2015 Charles Hoffacker).

Do you get your identity from what people say about you, or do you get your identity from what God says about you? We must look ourselves in the mirror and say, “I am loved and accepted just as I am.” Am I perfect? No. But do I have to be perfect for God to love me? No. I now have a new identity, like Jesus’ identity. It is a “BORN IDENTITY.” One of the most important things God says about Jesus as he begins his earthly ministry is that he states Jesus’ identity. Think about unwanted, unneeded, or unappreciated children in this world. Can you imagine how that must make a child feel? Yet God said to Jesus, “*You are my Son.*” I don’t deny you; I claim you! And once we have a “BORN IDENTITY”, that is the same thing that God says to us! I don’t deny you; I claim you! That is the identity God has given to all who trust in him through faith in Jesus Christ. We belong to God! By God’s grace! Amen.