

When God Answers Prayer

After starting a new diet I altered my drive to work to avoid passing my favorite bakery. I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and as I approached, there in the window were a host of chocolates, donuts, and cheesecakes.

I felt this was no accident, so I prayed ... "Lord, it's up to You. If You want me to have any of those delicious goodies, create a parking place for me directly in front of the bakery."

And sure enough, on the eighth time around the block, there it was! God is so good!

PRAY

"Who am I"

As we reflect back on Jesus' resurrection and see how much Christ endured, we can also find tremendous joy for knowing that heaven awaits us. Having "FAITH" in Christ, is how we answer the question "Who Is This Jesus". Being adopted and becoming like little children has tremendous meaning for us. When we accepted Christ, that allowed us to walk in the newness of life and it has a huge impact on who we become. It's life changing and who ever we were before our conversion, "dies" and is washed white as snow.

Changing the question from "Who Is This Jesus" to "Who am I" is a tough one. Most of us have lived for quite some time and we've all been through a number of changes in our lives. I really like the book of Ecclesiastes and during one study of the book, we started the study by doing an exercise. First, we did an examination of our own lives. We reviewed our lives from childhood to our current days. Taking the time to reflect on the different stages of our lives was needed because then we added, when we saw God in the picture. Vanity, vanity, vanity!

Meaningless, meaningless, meaningless! Solomon's point is all about how we try to live life "Apart from God". By looking back as far as we can and seeing how much we try to do things on our own, Solomon's point means more. When we don't include God, we can struggle with knowing the answer to "Who Am I".

Think about when you were just a small child. Think about when you were playing with the other kids and getting ready to start school. Your parents may have prepared you for school and you felt great about that. Maybe you liked to play a little too much or maybe you were terrified of leaving your mom. This is a time that children have to experience what it means to be in a new world. This is a huge change for children and now they have to learn to fit in. From Elementary school we move on to middle school. What was that like? We've gotten a little smarter and we've all gotten bullied some. This is another new beginning. Then we reach our teen years and go to high school. After we finish high school, we feel like "We made it".

Some of us moved onto college or started the journey of developing a career in the trades.

Try to think about how all those years effected your life and how they helped to form your identity. If we continue our time line and move into our 20's and 30's, this is when we fall in love. Establishing families and becoming a responsible adult takes on importance. A lot of people start identifying with God and a spiritual life becomes real important. Money or lack of it causes a change in our lives. We start to move away from old friends and get new ones. For many people, this is when children start coming into our lives. "Who am I" changes again.

For some people, their relationship with God start to take on even more meaning. Each step of life is constantly about figuring out "Who am I".

We know that through every step of our life, God was there. But, seeing God in all those times can be tough. We may not of felt God but, He was still there. God always had plans for us. Sadly, We've all had times in our lives when we've been a victim to some terrible event and that too can change our view of "Who I am". We've also hurt others in ways that changed "Who They Are". Every one of us has a story. My story is different than yours, your story is different from your spouses or friends.

Last week was Easter Sunday and we all had a chance to feel what Jesus went through. His crucifixion was for giving life to anyone who wants it. We got to feel the impact on how God changed the world and for how God demonstrated His love for us.

Last Wednesday, about 10 people attended the class on "The Cross of Jesus" and we had a great conversation about how the cross shows us just "Who we are". In chapter 7, Wiersbe looked at 4 followers of Jesus. All 4 witnessed the crucifixion and he tried to relate to what they might have been thinking. He conducted an interview with them.

He spoke about Mary the mother of Jesus, John, Mary Magdalene and Salome. I really liked his approach and if we place ourselves at the feet of the cross, we can learn a lot about what our true identity is. The cross gets down to the core of each of us. The cross of Jesus is where the rubber hits the road.

Wiersbe presented it this way;

For Mary the mother of Jesus this could have been seen as a place of reward. She was chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus. She got to have the experience of the Angel that brought her the good news. Her purity and goodness is what made God choose her. She got to give birth to Jesus. She seen Him grow up and got to care for Him. She got to give Jesus the love that only a mother could understand. Jesus was a part of her. Not only was she blessed by God but she also had to face the sword. From the very beginning they had to flee and because of Jesus she had to know that so many other children had to suffer because of her son. She was gossiped about, rejected and shunned. In the United states, when a person commits a crime, mothers aren't permitted to testify for their children in court. No mother is ever going to let their children go to prison. In those times, Mary could have stood up and lied about Jesus to make the crucifixion stop but instead, she knew who Jesus was and she couldn't lie. All she could do was stay silent. Her reward from Jesus was; He gave her John as an adopted son to care for her. Mary's love for Jesus was incredible and because she lived a pretty pure life, God rewarded her.

If you were John you may be at a place of responsibility. If we look at Matthew 10:38 **Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.** Like all of the disciples, John fled with them but, John had to turn around and return to witness the crucifixion. Jesus found forgiveness for him and because of His love for John, Jesus trusted him to take care of Mary the mother of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene probably felt a lot different. She came from a place of redemption. She was healed from the bondage a 7 demons. She was probably doing some really terrible things. She was in bondage to Satan and Jesus delivered her. I'm going to use Luke 7:44. The story actually begins in verse 36 but I'm going to start at 44. **44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." 48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."**

Jesus can turn "darkness into light" and he can turn anyone from the power of Satan to God. She was healed by Jesus and she was forever grateful for being forgiven so much. What a contrast from Mary the mother of Jesus and John. Salome may have been at a place of rebuke. Salome was Mary's sister, the mother of John and James. Matthew 20: **20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. 21 "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." 22 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. 23 Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." 24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** Salome didn't know what she was asking. Because of what she asked for, Her 2 sons, James and John faced terrible times. James was the first of the apostles to be martyred and even though John was the last to die, he suffered tremendously. Salome wanted them to be held high and to be honored. Salome's judgement of others and her selfishness brought great sorrow.

The point of each of these response is, Jesus died for all of them. He had to forgive all of them. Like them, every one of us, have our own identity in Christ. When we put ourselves at the foot of the cross, we get to know "Who I Am". It isn't about what we've accomplished in our lives. Going back to Ecclesiastes and seeing that when we live our lives "APART FROM GOD", we never find our true identity. Try to place yourself at the cross and think about what you would have been thinking, why do you need Jesus for yourself. These four examples are just for us to ponder. You may relate to one and not another. You might have a different person in the bible that you can relate to. The point is; at the cross is where they found themselves. "Who am I" is only for knowing who "I want to become". Jesus died so that we can live.

Galatians 5:22 **22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.**

This is our gift. Enjoying our adoption started at the cross and will end at the cross. Whatever it was that caused you to be separated from God was taken away by Christ. I would love to think that my story before the cross related most to Mary or John. Having their identity is probably the best of the four.

They needed Christ too. Many feel like Mary Magdalene or Salome. Christ frees all of us. It's all about knowing why you needed Christ to die for you. It's about extending MERCY and GRACE to all others. We can take joy in knowing that anything dividing us in our relationship with God is able to washed white as snow. Confessing that we need Christ in our lives is "Who I Am"

It's our ticket into heaven.

Let's pray