

SERIES: Who Am I? Discovering Our God Given Identity. (Slide #1)

TITLE: “Can I See Your Passport?”

TEXT: Genesis 12:1-3; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rom. 1:16

DATE: August 5, 2007

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. We look for a second week at our God-given identity.
 1. As was stated last week, as my Sabbatical began to wind down, the Lord began to talk hard with me about this matter of identity.
 2. The word that kept coming to me from the Lord was this: **(Slide #2)** *The Church does not understand who they are. God’s people have an identity crisis. The people of God need to be reminded of their God-given identity and challenged to lay hold of it.*
 3. **(Slide #3)** So last week we began a time of self-discovery and we began with an announcement that one of our critical distinguishing marks as the people of God is the mark of BLESSING.
 - a. Have you been practicing the application points from last week? Let’s review:
 - (1) We were challenged to answer the “How are you question?” with the answer, “BLESSED.”
 - (2) We were challenged to believe God’s promise of blessing to the point of praying to receive what God has already offered. Are we praying differently?
 - (3) We were challenged to review our lives from a different perspective: From victory-to-victory instead of from defeat-to-defeat – it changes our understanding.
 - (4) We were challenged to lay aside negativity and determine that we are going to become the most optimistic people on the face of the earth. Have we set aside whining and complaining and replaced it with optimism? (Offer some brief thoughts about “squeaky wheels”)
 - b. Well, I hope we’ve done just that and will continue to do so for the rest of our lives.
 - c. **WE ARE BLESSED! IT IS WHO WE ARE! BLESSING IS A CRITICAL DISTINGUISHING MARK OF ALL WHO CALL THEMSELVES CHRISTIAN.**
- B. As we look again at our text in Genesis 12:1-3 – The Covenant formula established between God and all who would follow after Him – we discover a second critical mark.
- C. Let me introduce this second mark as follows. . . .
- D. **(Slide #4) Illustration: Important documents in my life**
 1. **BIRTH CERTIFICATE**
 - a. From its appearance, there would be nothing significant about this document: it’s discolored, fairly simple, handwritten (not typed) and seemingly unimportant.
 - b. But this piece of paper is a critical piece of paper to me: it documents my entry into the world, which, according to this certificate, took place at 5:02 PM on March 27, 1961 in St. Mary’s Hospital, Kansas City, MO.
 - c. It declares to all who would care that on the affixed date a person entered into the world and became a citizen of the Planet Earth.
 - d. As simple as this certificate is, it carries power, for there are times when without it something cannot be done: we present it at school, to secure a marriage license, to receive a passport, to government agencies such as the SS Administration, at the crossing of some national borders.
 - e. This is in fact an important demonstrating a significant status: Member of the Great Planet

Earth.

2. **MARRIAGE LICENSE AND MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE**

- a. This second document looks a little more impressive and is significantly more important to me.
- b. I hold in my hand a document that is called a “Certificate of Marriage” and attached to it is also a copy of Nancy and I’s “Marriage License.”
- c. According to the receipt that is enclosed with this certificate and license, at the cost of \$20 on September 19, 1983 a license to marry was purchased, the beginning of a critical stage in the life of Nancy and I.
- d. On the Certificate of Marriage, signed by Pastor Alan R. Dicer and witnessed by Amy Rhoades and Larry Lain, it states that Donald Eugene Lain and Nancy Kay Rhoades were united in marriage on the first day of October, 1983.
- e. This document is very important to me, for it speaks of a significant status: Member of the ranks of married, and not just married, married to Nancy Kay Roades, now, Nancy Lain.

3. **PASSPORT**

- a. This third document I hold in my hand is also very important and very impressive looking.
- b. I hold in my hand a document called a “Passport.” This is a very important document for anyone who is traveling, and it carries power with it.
- c. On the outside of this passport is a critical announcement – at least I think it is: It says in full, “Passport: United States of America.”
- d. I said last week that a part of our source of blessing is that we are blessed to be citizens of the United States of America. I’m proud of that truth and proud to carry a document that announces my citizenship.
- e. There’s power in this document: it serves as an entry pass into other countries and a re-entry pass into the United States. It declares my source of belonging, but also my source of protection.
- f. On page four of this document American citizens are instructed to inform a US Embassy when they are in a foreign country and to report or appeal to that embassy if in trouble. Why? Because as citizens of the United States of America we are granted the protection of our nation, no matter where we are in the World. Pretty neat!
- g. When there were dangers while my family lived in Haiti, missionaries were told that if need, the United States would provide aircraft to fly them to safety. Why? Because they were citizens of the United States of America and because of that they were under the protective hand of a nation.
- h. This document is very important to me, for is speaks of a significant status: A citizen of the United States of America with all the rights and privileges that come with it.

- E. So why do I present to you these documents this morning? Because they are hard evidence proof of who I am: A member of the world by birth, a member of a family unit by marriage, a citizen of the United States. This is who I am? These are some of my identifying marks, and they are important.
- F. I’m proud of all three of these marks of membership.
- G. There’s another membership that I’m proud to claim, spoken of in our text in Gen. 12:1-3 along with the words of Peter in 1 Peter 2:9-10.
- H. This brings us to our second identifying mark. Our first is that we are blessed. Our second is. . .

II. (Slide #5) **IDENTIFYING MARK #2: WE BELONG TO THE NATION OF GOD!**

- A. Listen to the words of God issued to Abram in the covenant words of (**Slide #6**) Gen. 12:2-3 – *“I will make you a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you will be cursed; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*
- B. Listen to the wonderful words of Peter who, in a sense, restates the covenant miracle in (**Slide #7**) 1 Peter 2:9: *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*
- C. As if afraid his hearers would not grasp the wonder of this statement, Peter goes on in (**Slide #8**) verse 10: *“Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*
- D. (**Slide #9**) Think with me for a few moments about this second critical identifying mark of the believer: The mark of citizenship in the nation of God:
1. (**Slide #10**) **We are a part of God’s nation because He has chosen us.**
 - a. Consider with the miracle of the words of Gen. 12:2. God says to Abram – His choice: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. . . .” This was God initiating and Abram receiving.
 - b. Peter says it so well: We are a “chosen people. . . .”
 - c. This morning I want us to all hear this important word: Our citizenship in the nation of God is not by accident nor is it because of human will; God is the initiator of the covenant: **WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD TO BE A PART OF HIS NATION.**
 - d. Now for some of us there is something un-nerving about this truth, so let me clarify it for us to eliminate confusion.
 - e. Looking at the Abram covenant – and we will look at this more next week – clearly we see that while Abram was God’s initial choice, He was chosen to pass on that choice to all nations, announcing and offering blessing to all who would receive it.
 - f. In the initial covenant was an announcement of choice by God that included in its scope the entire world.
 - g. As Jesus came, He made clear the heart of God who came to save “the world.”
 - h. Peter states clearly in 2 Peter 3:9, “God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”
 - i. The miracle of God’s choice is in His divine initiative – It was He who began the process to include us in His great nation. It is not a choice of limitation – all are included. The only ones excluded are the ones who have rejected God’s choice.
 - j. The miracle is still this: Our inclusion in the nation of God is primarily due to the fact that God in His great mercy chose us to be included. **THAT IS A MIRACLE. WE ARE CHOSEN.**
 - k. So what is included in the choice to be a part of the nation of God?
 2. (**Slide #11**) **We are a part of God’s nation that has distinguishing marks:**
 - a. (**Slide #12**) **It is a GREAT NATION.**
 - (1) Great in its lineage.
 - (2) Great in its boundaries – covers the world.
 - (3) Great in its King – the Creator God who is also the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-loving, ever-present God that is eternally on our side.
 - b. (**Slide #13**) **It is a BLESSED NATION.** – covered this last week.
 - c. (**Slide #14**) **It is a HOLY NATION.**

- (1) This is an important mark of distinction and it is important to understand.
 - (2) First let me say this: Those who belong to God do not make God's nation holy; those who belong to the nation of God are made holy by God.
 - (3) Because we belong to God and God belongs to us, we become the Holy people of God.
 - (4) What does it mean?
 - (5) Peter helps us here. Listen to what he goes on to say in verses 11-12: *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*
 - (6) To those who would cry “IMPOSSIBLE,” Peter later says in his second epistle, chapter 1:3-4: *“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”*
 - (7) Peter earlier instructs the church with these words in 1 Peter 1:13-16: *“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”*
 - (8) It is critical that we determine today that as members of the nation of God, we are a part of a Holy Nation – we are to live lives that are holy.
 - (9) How? Well we certainly can't be holy. We are made holy as God fills us and guides us and we obey His direction.
 - (10) The challenge for the church is to believe their identity. We are called to lay hold of our national identity: The holy people of God.
- d. **(Slide #15) It is a NATION OF BELONGING AND MERCY.**
- While it makes sense that since we are chosen, we also belong; it seems as if this distinctive mark deserves some brief personal attention.
- I wonder, do we understand the miracle of belonging to the nation of God? Is there awe in that reality? Is there a sense of privilege and honor that comes to us at this revelation? Peter seems to want to dwell here. Having stated the status of the believer in verse 9 – and included in that list is the words “a people belonging to God” – it's almost as if Peter wants us to ponder the thought a little more.
- He comes back to it in verse 10 when he says: “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have receive mercy.”
- I think that Peter wants us to pause and ponder the thought in absolute awe.
- Before God chose us and we accepted His choice, we were nothing.
- But since God's choice, we belong to God as His prized possession.
- As ones who belong to God, we are the daily recipients of not only blessing and holiness but also mercy.
- We are the most fortunate and graced people on the face of the earth.

(Slide #16) Laying Claim to Our Identity.

- A. So what do we do with these great blessings? How do we respond to such tremendously good news?
- B. Well, let me begin with a question that is critically important? When I first ask it most of you will answer it quickly as if it's a "no-brainer" question, but I want to challenge each of us to take the question seriously.
- C. Here's the question: Are we proud to be called Christians? Let me rephrase the question in several different forms for us to consider:
 - 1. Do we want people to know that we are Christians, or would we rather keep that matter quiet.
 - 2. Would we be embarrassed if someone discovered that we were a Christian?
 - 3. Do we live our lives in such a way that we try to hide our identity as Christians?
 - 4. Do we believe that letting someone know that we are Christian is offensive?
 - 5. Do we withhold our identity from others and refrain from living and proclaiming what we believe because we feel that to do so is not polite or politically incorrect?
 - 6. Do we believe that our faith should be kept separate from our business; that religion and secular life should be kept separate just like many believe religion and politics should be kept separate?
 - 7. Do we believe that there are actually several pathways to God and that Christianity is just one and so we may as well keep it to ourselves and let everyone follow their own path.
 - 8. Do we believe that the only difference before we met Jesus and after we met Jesus is that our sins are forgiven?
 - 9. Does knowing Jesus as Savior mean anything to us other than interesting information? Do we live differently because we belong to Jesus?
- D. I ask all those questions, because I think there are many Christians – maybe most – that seem to be embarrassed that they belong to God. I know because I see it in the way many Christians fail to live in the victory that is theirs in Christ. Many have simply rejected their Christian identities.
- E. (Share General William Booth's four points of departure from the faith from his speech at the end of the nineteenth century)
- F. Somewhere in the pathways of many the enemy has somehow managed to rob the Christian: he has stolen their identity and the joyous realizations that come with it. He has managed to convince Christians that they should really be ashamed of their Christian status instead of proud. Somehow he has diminished the miracle of belonging to Christ.
- G. Can I tell you something this morning? If you belong to Christ there is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, we should collectively be rejoicing in the fact and announcing it to all who would listen.
 - 1. Think with me for a final few moments.
 - 2. Because we belong to Christ, we are the most blessed people on the face of the earth and more blessings are just around the corner.
 - 3. We belong to God because He loved us enough to invite us into His nation with all the benefits: greatness, blessing, belonging, mercy, and much more.
 - 4. And listen to this: these three documents that I presented to you earlier – my birth certificate, my marriage license and certificate, and my passport – they are all important documents, but they are limited. Citizenship in God's nation – not stamped on a piece of paper but stamped on our hearts – have unlimited power.
 - Such citizenship gives us access to the God every moment of every day – we can talk to the King any time we want.
 - Such citizenship gives us access to all the power and all the knowledge and all the wisdom of God.
 - Such citizenship gives us access to the great love and mercy and grace of God.

And listen: such citizenship gives you and me access to heaven and eternal life. No other document can do that!!!!

We are a part of a nation in which we can be proud/not ashamed. The apostle Paul certainly had it right when he proclaimed in Romans 1:16: *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the gentile.” – last I checked that would be everyone!*

This morning I call the church again to understand and claim and rejoice in our identity in Christ. We need not be ashamed. NO! We need to lay hold of who we are and live it.

(Song of celebration: New Name Written Down In Glory)

(Slide #17) This week’s application challenge: This week I want to challenge each of us to do this simple thing: Daily read 1 Peter 2:9-12. After each reading, ask God to help you understand the message of those words and to show you specifically how you can live a life more consistent with your identity in Christ. Based on what Christ reveals to you that day, practice claiming your identity everywhere you go.