CRAIG: Good morning, Mission Hills.

TOGETHER: Good morning.

CRAIG: And how many of you were here actually Friday night for the big Halloween party? Yeah, there were a ton of volunteers and thank you. I showed up wearing a horse head costume as my wife dressed as a cowboy which meant I had a hard time seeing. I was seeing out of one nostril actually but what I could see was awesome. I mean 1100 kids and if you have never been in a place where there’s 1100 middle school students, and you have told them, “Have a good time” like that combination is explosive and it was awesome. And about 60 kids came to Christ, think about this 60 kids... Yeah, think about this, 60 kids put on a costume, they had one identity and they put on a costume to pretend to be something else. When they took off the costume, they really were somebody else. They really had a new identity in Christ.

And so our job now is to come alongside them and help them figure out what it looks like to take a grip on that new identity. And the reality is that our identity in Christ can be a little slippery. There’s a lot of pressure, there’s a lot of identity theft going on. We said a couple weeks ago that what we do as a result of who we think we are, right? The problem is that remembering who we are is remarkably complicated. And what I wanna deal with today is what God gives us in the second chapter of the book of Ephesians which I really think is the beginning of sort of the game plan for how do I really grab a hold of who I am.

So if you got your Bibles or if you can grab one from the seats in front of you, and by the way if you don’t have a Bible, that one of the seat in front of you is your bible. We’d love for you to take that home. That’s our gift to you. We’re gonna look this morning at chapter two of Ephesians where Paul begins to lay out what it looks like to really grab a hold of our identity in Christ so that it can’t be wrested away from us. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 1 begins this way. It says, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. And all of us lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath,” or literally we are by nature children of wrath. Now that sounds like kind of a negative way to start off here doesn’t it?

“As for you, you are dead in your sins and transgressions.” But you need to understand Paul is not attacking he’s acknowledging. He’s not saying this is just true of them. He is also saying it was true of him. He goes on to say, “We also were in exactly the same place.” He’s just laying the cards on the table, he’s saying we’re all playing out of the same deck and it wasn’t a good deck. We were all in a bad place. The other thing you gotta understand is that he’s not criticising he’s not saying this in order to say, “Look how bad we were.” He’s contrasting. He’s trying to show this is what we were so that we can begin to understand what an incredible thing is now true of us.

He wants us to see the contrast between the old identity and the new, so that we can understand how important it is that we grab a hold of this new one. And what he says was true of us in the old identity is that we were dead in our transgressions and sins. Dead. Now, when Paul says “dead,” here’s all he means. He means cut off from having a relationship with God. That’s what Paul means by dead. Cut off from having a relationship with God. That’s a little different maybe than the way we think about death but in the modern world, we’ve been kind of trained that you think about death in terms of biology. So for us death is the heart stops beating, the electrical activity in the brain stops and that’s what it means to be dead, but in the ancient world, death meant you were cut off from relationship.

It wasn’t about biology. It was about community. See, when someone died, they were no longer available to the community,
they were no longer in relationship. A great way to see that operating in the ancient world is actually to go all the way back to Genesis. God created Adam and Eve to have a relationship with Him. God just gave them one instruction he said, “Don’t eat from the tree that’s in the middle.” And what he said literally was, “For on the day that you eat of it, you will die.” On the day you eat of it, you will die and we know the story. Right? Adam and Eve ate from the tree and did they die? Yeah, it depends on how you define death, right?

I mean they didn’t drop over dead, the heart didn’t stop beating, the brain didn’t cease to have any activity. But remember up to that point God came into the garden, and when He came into the garden, they ran for Him, they ran towards Him. This day when He came into the garden, they ran from Him, they ran away from Him. The relationship had been severed so God was absolutely right in the ancient perspective where death is primarily about relationship and community. They died. They were cut off from a relationship with Him. And the reason Paul says that we were all cut off from a relationship with God was because of our transgressions and our sins.

Now, the word sins is probably a pretty familiar term. Anybody hearing the word sin for the very first time today? Yeah, we all know kind of what it sin but transgression is little bit less common term, right? When was the last time somebody called you a transgressor? I mean that somehow feels worse doesn’t it? Like yeah, I’m a sinner but you call me a transgressor we’re gonna have a conversation afterwards. Right?

Here’s the thing. The word transgression in the Greek really just means to cross over a line that was forbidden. That’s what it means to transgress. You got a line, God gave us a boundary and you cross over it. So there are some things God said, “Don’t cross over that line.” He said, “Don’t murder each other.” If you murder somebody, you’ve crossed over a line. Jesus upped the ante a little bit. He said, “Listen, I say don’t even harbor anger in your heart.”

So you know, you can’t control when you get mad at somebody, right? Now over time the Holy Spirit hopefully will work on us so that we don’t get angry right away but you can’t control when somebody cuts you off in traffic and you get mad, that’s just what it is. What you can control is what you continue to do after that. If you continue to harbor anger in your heart towards that person, if you follow them. If you take their exit, you follow them wherever they’re going and you get out. Okay, now you’ve crossed a line, okay? You’ve harbored anger in a way that God said, “You can’t do that.” So transgression means to cross over a line.

And sin, the word for sin literally means to miss the mark. So there are things that God says you’re supposed to live this way and we don’t quite get there. So it’s not a line that we cross over, it’s really a line that we don’t even get to that we’re supposed to have gone over. So God says things like this. He says, “Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church even being willing to give himself up for her unto death.” Any husbands here? And any husbands here actually died for their wives? Yeah, weird question, right? Because if your hand goes up at this point, you’re lying. Listen, I love my wife but do I love her as sacrificially as God calls me to? Certainly not every day. And in that way I don’t quite make it to the mark that God set in place.

God said this. He said, “Be holy as I am holy.” Anybody here feeling as holy as God? Yeah, but God said that’s what you’re supposed to do. You’re supposed to be “holy as I am holy.” It’s the bar. That’s where it’s been raised to and if we don’t make it to that point we have sinned. And so there are lines that are crossed, and there are marks that are missed. But here’s the thing. God says that because of the line crossing and the mark missing, we’re cut off from a relationship with him. Which doesn’t really seem fair does it? Because in every relationship there are lines that are not supposed to be crossed and marks that are not supposed to be missed. But when we cross the lines or miss the marks, it doesn’t mean the end of that relationship.

I mean I love my wife, but I don’t love her as well as I should every day. I don’t quite make it to the mark of what I should. I’m not as selfless as I should be so I miss the mark. I’m supposed to be kind. I’m not supposed to be harsh and sometimes I speak harshly. Which means that I crossed a line, but that’s not the end of my relationship with her. So why should it be any different with God? And the answer is because
Paul’s not talking here about a line that was crossed or a mark that was missed. He’s not even talking about a couple of lines that were crossed or a couple of marks that were missed. He’s talking about the whole way that we lived. The whole thing that characterized their lives. You notice what he said. He said, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live.”

Literally what the Greek says there in which you used to walk around. Says you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to walk around. What he’s saying is not you crossed a line, not you missed a mark, not even occasionally you did that. But he says this used to just be the thing that characterized your life. You walked around in a world of sin and transgression. In other words, apart from Christ, our lives are defined by line crossing and mark missing. And I know that sounds harsh, but I can tell you from personal experience and certainly from what God’s word says that it’s absolutely true. That even when we try not to cross lines, we end up crossing lines. And even when we try to reach marks we don’t quite make it.

You know, you think of as a guy, a high school guy standing on the street and he sees a little old lady with a bag of groceries, and she’s trying to cross the street so he thinks, “I’m gonna help her out.” It’s a good thing, right? And he helps her out, he gets her across the street. You know, how did that miss the mark? Well, because I have been a teenage guy and I know that there’s that thought in the back of your head going, “I wonder if she’s gonna pay me for this?” Or I wonder if the really cute girl down the street noticed what a good guy I am?” Now it doesn’t mean that the deed itself is evil. But you understand it didn’t make it to the mark. And the prophet Isaiah says this. He says, “Even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.” And that’s what he means is that even when we’re trying to do right apart from Christ, we can’t quite make it to the line. There’s always this sort of this pollution that happens, even the stuff that we think is good.

And so Paul says, “Yeah, apart from Christ, our lives are defined by line crossing and mark missing and that’s why we’re cut off from a relationship with God.” And that’s a sobering reality to realize that’s what life was defined by outside of Christ, but it actually gets worse because Paul says, “Not only were we cut off from a relationship with God, but we were brought into a relationship that was much less desirable.” In other words, our sin brings us under the control of who? Satan. I heard a lot of whispering “Satan.” But it’s interesting. Paul isn’t actually use that word. He doesn’t call him Satan. He says “It’s the the ruler of the kingdom of the air” or some translations the prince of the power of the air.

You know, why doesn’t he just name his name? Well, because Ephesus was a superstitious city. And one of the superstitions in Ephesus was you didn’t say the name of a spirit out loud because that would call its attention to you. And so Paul’s kind of playing along [inaudible 00:11:23] he’s like, “Okay, you don’t want me to say his name. You’re scared of that. Got it. But you know who I’m talking about.” What he says is this. He says, “Our lives as defined by line crossing and mark missing brought us under the control of Satan.” And you go, “Well, why is that? Why did that happen?” Well, think about it this way. If I go into the lobby after the service today and I meet the warden from a prison, and if in the middle of our conversation he suddenly says, “Drop and give me 20.” I’m gonna go, okay, two things. First that’s a lot of pushups. Let’s be more realistic. How about five or six, okay? But the second thing I’m gonna say is, “You’ve got nothing on me. You don’t have any authority over me. I don’t have to do what you say.”

But if I commit a crime and go to jail, suddenly what happens is I am under the warden’s authority, right? At that point he does have the ability to issue commands that I end up having to obey, and that’s what Paul’s getting at here. That our sin brings us under the command of the worst warden imaginable. And the reason I say he’s the worst warden is because what Satan does with his ability to influence us, to command us is that he causes us to sin even more. You notice what Paul says. He says that, “We used to live in this way when we followed the ways of this world, and the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” He says, “He’s at work in those who are apart from Christ.” He says all of us lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our flesh. That’s what Satan is doing he’s like, “Yeah, you got that appetite? Go satisfy it. You got that desire? Yeah, yeah. Go satisfy it.” And so we’re doing what’s natural but we’re also doing what were pushed to and it’s this terrible, terrible spiral.
That’s what we were, but that’s not what we were left. Right? That’s not where we left. God in spite of the fact that we were living lives cut off from a relationship with Him. God still loved us desperately. So what did He do? He says this. He says, “Because of His great love with which He loved us, God who is rich in Christ, is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace that you have been saved and God raised us up with Christ and he’s seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

There’s a why and a what that we have to understand there. The why is why did God do anything? Given what we were and what was true of us, what our old identity was, why did God do anything? And the answer is because He loved us. But not just that He loved us. Literally what it says is because of the great love with which He loved us. God stepped in to change our circumstances because of the great love with which He loved us. And I love that phrasing. It’s not just that He loved us, but that He had this great love. This incredible thing in and of itself and He loved us with it.

The great love with which He loved us. What did He do with His great love with which He loved us? Well, three things. He says that He made us alive with Christ, that He raised us up with Christ, and that He seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms. And I want you to notice that He doesn’t say that He made us alive, that He raised us up, and that He seated us up with Christ. He says He did each of those things with Christ. He made us alive with Christ, He seated us with Christ, He raised us up with Christ. And then the language there He reminds me when my kids were little sometimes I’d come home and they’d come and they’d each one grab a leg and they just basically sit on my foot and they’d wrap their arms around me, they’d wrap their legs around me and for a while everywhere I went I went much slower dragging them along.

But they wouldn’t let go. So everywhere they went they went with me, and that’s the kind of language that Paul’s using here. What he’s saying is, “Listen, when we put our faith in Jesus, we take Jesus in a bear hug and everywhere that Jesus goes, we go with Him.” It’s “Mary Had A Little Lamb” kind of stuff, right? Everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go. Everywhere Jesus goes, we’re sure to go because we’ve got hold of Him. And so what is true of Jesus, becomes true of us. That’s what Paul’s saying. And so Jesus died on the cross for our sins, but then what did God do? He made him alive. And again, not in terms of heart beat and brain activity. That stuff’s there. But the real core, the real meaning here is that He brought Him into a relationship. You remember when Jesus was on the cross as he was paying for our sins, he said this. He said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

And what that acknowledges is at that moment, the Son of God experienced a break in His relationship with His father. Because of our sin, God the Father turned His back and the relationship was severed. For the first time in all of eternity, they were not in a perfect relationship because that’s the consequence of sin, but Jesus did that for us and their relationship was broken but God made him alive. He restored Him to that relationship. And He did the same thing for us. If we have our relationship through faith in Jesus, we are also brought back into a relationship with God, we’re welcomed into a relationship with God now. I want you to hear that. You’re welcomed. Not tolerated. Welcomed. Not accepted. Welcomed. God delights that He has a relationship with you that’s been restored. When you come to worship, I don’t know how you feel about God but I want you to make sure you understand when you come to worship God in His throne, He’s not going, “All right, fine. Give me a song.” No, no, no. God’s arms are flying. He’s delighted that you’re here to worship him because He welcomes us into that relationship. He’s excited about that. He’s thrilled about that relationship that we have.

He says that “God raised us up with Christ.” He didn’t leave Jesus alive on the slab in the grave. He took Him out of the grave and He put Him into a new set of circumstance. He raised him out of that place into a new one. And in the same way He takes us up out of our old circumstances into new ones. He takes us out of our old identity into a new one. He pulls us out of our old family into a new one. We’re raised up with Him into place and into relationships that are appropriate for the new identity we have in Christ. And he says that “He’s seated us with him in the heavenly realms” which is probably the hardest one for us to understand, because I think we naturally read it and we go, “Yeah, we’re seated with Him so I guess we’re with Him that’s the key, right? We’re in His presence.” But that’s not what it’s saying. It’s actually saying something far more profound.
Says He’s seated with, He’s seated us with Him which is borrowing language actually from what my friend Scott preached last week in Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 20 we’re told this, “That God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.” You understand that’s language of authority. He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms. Seated Him far above all rule and authority. Those are names by the way for spiritual forces of the Ephesians we’re familiar with. And he says Jesus is seated above those. He has authority over the rules and authorities. He seated Him above every power and dominion. Again, spiritual forces language. He seated Him above every name that is invoked. The Ephesians would often invoke the names of spirits to try to get power but He says Jesus is seated in authority over every name that gets invoked by the city of Ephesus. Not only in the present age but also in the one to come and God placed all things under His feet, and He appointed Him to be head over everything.

The seated language is about authority. And it makes sense to us that Jesus has authority over all spiritual forces, right? It makes sense to us that Jesus has been given authority over every demonic spirit, He’s been given authority over Satan. But what Paul says in Ephesians 2:6 is this, “That you and I because of our faith in Christ we have been seated with him in the heavenly realms” which means that we have been given a position of authority as well. You understand what Paul is saying is this. Not only are we set free from bondage to Satan, but we are placed in a position of authority over Satan. Now I want to hear that. It’s not just that in Christ you’ve been set free from Satan’s authority, in Christ you’ve been given a position of authority over Satan.

And I realize that doesn’t ring true. Because in our mind Satan of course he’s the boogie man, right? He’s the worst of the worst and how could we possibly have a position of authority over him? Because we’re in Christ. I mean what Paul is saying is basically this. You, if you have faith in Christ you are the boogie man to the boogie man. You are the devil’s worst nightmare because the devil no longer has authority over you. The roles have been reversed. You have authority over him. And I know. I can see it in your faces. Some of you are like, “Really?” Yeah, really. So what the Word of God says, “Seated in the heavenly realms with Christ.”

In the book of James chapter 4 verse 7 he says this, “Resist the devil and he will...” Does anybody know? “Flee.” I love that word flee. It’s not resist the devil and he will like, “Oh, okay. Whatever.” Resist the devil and he will flee. Flee is terror language, right? You flee from a battle when you’re getting your butt kicked. You run in terror. This is the language he says, “Resist the devil and he will flee” because he has no authority over you. Not in Christ. The only thing the devil can do at this point is he can work by intimidation and identity theft. The devil cannot stand against you. This is the word of God’s teaching to you. The devil cannot stand against you. His only hope is to convince you not to take a stand against him.

And we mess this one up all the time. I am consistently frustrated. And I’m gonna step on some toes here. It’s okay. I’m consistently frustrated by what passes for what I would call “spiritual warfare teaching” in the church today. Book after book written and they’re way, way too complicated. They have way too much information in attempts to like, you know, well, “What kind of demons are we dealing with and what sort of spirit is at work, and we gotta to identify this.” Yeah, that’s not what the Bible says. You want me to summarize the Biblical teaching on how to engage in spiritual warfare? When you become aware of the fact that there are spiritual forces at work, here’s what you do. “In the name of Jesus get out.” We’re done. Now that’s not gonna be a bestseller book. It’s way too short. But it’s profoundly Biblical.

We have been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. The only complicated thing about spiritual warfare is how often we fail to recognize that it’s happening, and therefore fail to take a hold of the authority that we have in Christ to deal with it. The devil cannot resist you, the devil cannot stand against you. His only hope is to make sure you don’t take a stand against him.

Because in Christ you’ve been seated in the heavenly realms. Wow. That’s big news, right? Why would God do that? Why would God make that possible? Why would He reverse those roles so thoroughly? I mean we’ve already heard to some extent. He said, “It’s because of the great love with which He loved us.” But He goes on and He says a little bit more. He says this in verse 7, he says, “He did it in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His Grace expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace that you’ve been saved through faith--and it’s not from yourselves. It’s a gift of God. It’s
not by works so that no one can boast.”

He did it because He loves you, but He also did it because He wanted you to know how kind He is. And His kindness is expressed to us in this. That salvation doesn’t depend upon our effort. We don’t have to work ourselves into a relationship with God. All we have to do is take hold of the work He’s already done on our behalf. And that’s the essence of the Gospel, right? Not by our works, but by grace. By God’s undeserved kindness. All we have to do is take hold of it, all we have to do is get a grip on it. All we have to do is say, “Jesus, I know I’ve done wrong and I’m sorry for it. I believe you died on the cross. I believe you rose from the dead. Come into my life and forgive my sins.” And we suddenly take a hold of God’s grace. We get a grip on it. By the way, that’s not a bad way for sharing the gospel if you’re ever at a loss. Getting the grip on it. I’ve done wrong. I’m sorry for the wrong I’ve done. I believe you died on the cross for me. I believe you rose from that. Come into my life and forgive my sin. And we get a grip on what God’s done, and that’s all we have to do is take hold of it.

You know, it’s interesting. I hear a lot that Christianity is not about works, right? That’s not right. Christianity is about works. Christianity is all about works. It’s just not about our works. It’s about the work God has done. Our call is not to work our way into God’s family. Our call is to rest in our adoption. Our call is not to strive to impress God. Our call is to take hold of the fact that God loves us, and that everything else flows out of that not towards it because there’s this too. He says this. He says, “For we are God’s handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Not works that lead to a relationship with God, but works which flow from a relationship with God. You see the reversal there?

I want you to understand the completeness, the astounding level of role reversal that’s going on here. He says, “Not that we were changed in Christ, not that we were adjusted in Christ, not that we were improved in Christ, not that we were tweaked in Christ.” But that we were what? We were created in Christ. In other words, He started over. He wiped the slate clean and He went back to the drawing board and He recreated us from the ground up. It’s not a small adjustment. If you are in Christ, you have not gotten a little bit better, you are a new creation. You’re not what you were. You are a son and a daughter adopted into a family made alive in a relationship with God, seated in the heavenly realm with authority over the spirit that used to drag you around.

It’s a holistic, fundamental transformation. We are new creations, and as a result of our new creation he says, “We do good works.” Although there’s actually a little bit of a play on words going on here. He doesn’t actually say to do good works. He literally says, “to walk around in good works.” He uses the same word that he used at the beginning when he said back before we were in Christ we walked around in line crossing and mark missing sin and transgression. We walked around is what characterizes and now he uses the exact same word again to say now that you’re a new creation in Christ. You know what you walk around in? You walk around in good works. That’s what defines you.

Our works don’t get us to God but our lives become defined by good works because of who we are in Christ now, or at least they should be. But the reality is that our identity crisis hard to hold onto. What does it mean to get a grip? And I think what Paul says here actually shows us one of the most important steps of what it means, what it takes to really get a good grip on our identity and begin living in light of it. It’s good works that flows from our relationship business.

Several years ago when I was first getting started in ministry, I was a youth pastor at a church in Cincinnati. And as is often the case as a youth pastor I got a chance to disciple several young men and my wife discipled several young girls. And one of my young men and one of her young girls kind of liked each other a little bit and they were going steady and then they were sort of... and then they decided to get engaged and they got married. It was awesome. About I don’t know 12, 13 years ago we were living out here at this point, had been for several years, we were driving through the Midwest and I got a phone call and it was actually from this girl’s sister. And she got me on the phone and she said...she kind of started off and she said, “I’m not really even sure why I’m calling.” “Well, I don’t know. So if this conversation is going anywhere it’s kind of up to you.” She goes, “Yeah, so you know that couple?” I won’t give their names. She said, “That couple, I don’t think we’re gonna make it. They’re, I don’t know, six or seven years into this thing I...pretty sure it’s over. I think it’s probably too late. I don’t think there’s much hope for their
marriage, but I just thought kind of as a last resort I’d call you.”

And I was like, “Well, all right. If it makes you feel better than being somebody’s absolute last ditch effort but okay.” She said, “I don’t know what you could say and what you could do, but I just thought maybe you could call him.” And I looked down the road and I realized I could see on the horizons Cincinnati which is where they lived. I was just in that moment pulling into and I thought, “Well, that’s probably not a coincidence.” So I said, “Yeah, I’ll call him and see if he can take a break from work and we could have lunch together.” And he did and we sat down at this mall, the Tri-County Mall in Cincinnati Ohio if anybody cares. Feel like details make these stories real, right?

And we talked and he told me what married life had looked like for the last several years since they got married. He sort of described what his life was like and her life was like and the whole thing. And at the end of it, he basically just said, “Yeah I mean I think it’s over. I think it’s done, I’m not even sure why we got married. It doesn’t feel like we’re married anymore. Honestly it’s never really felt like we’re married, and so I think it’s kind of over.” And then he kind of looked at me like, “So what you got for me?” Which is an intimidating place to be. He had to get back to work, I had to keep moving, and I realized I got one shot at this thing. And so I uttered up this quick prayer to the Lord God, “Do something.”

He’s looking at me and I’m looking back and I actually think God began to speak. I had this germ of an idea and so I said, “Okay here’s my best...the only I got. So here’s the thing. I’ve been listening to you talk about what married life looked like and it’s interesting to me it doesn’t sound like married life to me because you’ve described the friends you had before you got married and you still have all the same friends, and that’s fine, but you don’t have any new ones as a couple. She’s got her friends, you’ve got your friends you’ve never made any friends as a couple that you can do things with together. That’s kind of interesting to me.” I said, “You’ve got your hobbies and she’s got her hobbies, but you don’t have anything that you do for fun together. Yeah, you go to church and she goes to church but you’re not serving in any way together. You make your decisions, she makes her decisions but you’re not making decisions together.”

I said, “Here’s the thing. It doesn’t sound to me like you’ve ever embraced the reality of what it looks like to live as though you’re married. I mean you are married. That’s an identity thing. It’s an absolute fact you are a husband, she is a wife. You are one flesh according to God’s word but you’re not living in light of that reality. You’re not doing the things that you do as a married couple, and because of that your identity is slipping away.” So I said, “Here’s what I would suggest you do. Start making decisions together, start serving together, get some friends together, start having some stuff that you do together. Embrace the activities that come with your identity. You are married so embrace the activities that come with it.”

I’m out. It’s best I got. And it’s been about 15 years and they’re still together. A couple more kids in the mix and they’re not just together as near as I can tell. I sort of follow on Facebook, you know, they’re doing really well. It worked and there’s a part of me that goes, “Woo.” But there’s another part of me goes, you know, that’s exactly what Paul’s talking about here. This is just Biblical truth and basically you’d say it this way. To embrace your identity in Christ, embrace the activity that comes with that identity. You hear me? To embrace your identity to really get a grip on your identity in Christ sometimes what we have to do is begin embracing the activities that come with it. In the same way that they were married but they weren’t doing the things that married couples do, and that made their identity get slippery.

Sometimes in our relationship with Christ we are in Christ, but what we need to do is begin to embracing the activities that come with that identity. Like generosity. God’s people are generous. It’s just the way we are, that’s some of the good works that God has created in advance for us to walk around in. And so if we are in Christ, one of these things we need to do is embrace the things that come with it. If we embrace generosity. There’s a fine line here understand I’m not saying that being generous makes you a follower of Jesus. I’m not saying that embracing Christian activities makes you a Christian. No, that’s not what I’m saying at all, but I’m saying that your identity is sometimes pried from our grip because we have yet to grab a hold of the practical things that accompany that identity, the activities.
So if you’re in Christ start embracing generosity. I feel safe saying that because the offering plates have already been around, right? This is not a self-serving thing, this is a you serving thing. If you wanna really grab a hold of your identity in Christ and begin to live it out, embrace the activities that come with that identity. Become generous. The people of God worship. So embrace worship. “What does that mean? I’m here, right?” Yeah you are. I’m not looking at anybody in particular, but I’ll be honest, you know, I told you when we come to worship God does not worship us like this. There’s an astounding number of people that worship Him like this. I watch it. We come into worship. No. “So what do you want me to do, pastor? You want me to raise my hands?” Okay, do that. I mean maybe for you that’s the one step in beginning to embrace who you are in Christ by embracing the activity. Maybe actually raise your hand. You need to start here.

You understand I’m not saying that raising your hand has a fundamental impact on who you are. What I’m saying is if you are in Christ, you’re a worshipper of God. You’re welcomed into His presence and He longs for you to worship Him with some abandon. This is not abandon. This is not joy. So maybe what it means for you to embrace the activities that come with embracing your identity is to raise the hand a little bit, or just to actually sing. Or to sing a little bit louder and stop worrying about the people around you. The people of God worship so we embrace worship, and that allows us to embrace and get a grip on our identity.

The people of God are bold, and so we act courageously in the world outside. We embrace those activities. The people of God serve one another, and so we get involved in serving. The people of God sacrifice for the cause of the kingdom, and so maybe we need to make a sacrifice for the cause of the Kingdom and stop living so much for ourselves. Again, I’m not saying that stuff makes you a Christian. What I’m saying is your identity as a follower of Jesus sometimes is pulled from our grasp because we have not yet taken a hold of the activities that come from that identity.

So my challenge to you is basically two things this morning. Number one begin to live with a consistent reminder of who you are. Remind yourself of who you are in Christ. I have to look at myself in the mirror every morning and remind myself I’m a follower of Jesus. I am a new creation in Christ. That’s who I am so I need to live today in light of that. The second thing you should do is you begin to expect and seize the opportunities to demonstrate your new, true identity. You’re not earning it. God has already earned it for you. All you have to do is take hold of it. But we’re talking about demonstrating it, and what I find consistently is that when we begin to demonstrate who we are in Christ, we grab a hold of our identity in a way that it can no longer be pried from us.

So we expect to those opportunities. God he says has created good works for us to do. They’re in front of you every day, there are opportunities for you to walk around in. Good things today before you get out of this building, before you get home. There are opportunities before you sleep tonight there are opportunities. When you wake up tomorrow, you wake up for a day that is filled with opportunities to do the things that we naturally do as the people of God. We begin to expect them and you know what happens is we begin to notice them. When Clader [SP] first got pregnant, craziest thing happened in Castle Rock. A lot of women got pregnant at exactly the same time. It was weird. I was like, you know, “I’m gonna be a dad.” And I would walk into Walmart. I was like, “Pregnant lady, pregnant lady, holy...there’s pregnant women everywhere.” And there’s a part of me that thought I was beginning to set a trend of some sort, right?

But you know what I realized of course there were no more pregnant women then than there had ever been. What was the difference? Yeah, I was aware of them. I was aware and because I was aware, I was seeing. When we begin to expect opportunities to embrace the activity that comes from our identity, you’ll see ‘em and you’re worried. “Well, what are they gonna be?” Don’t worry about it. Remind yourself who you are, expect those opportunities, and when you see them, seize them. And you will find that your day is filled, absolutely filled to the brim and overflowing with good deeds not that earn you God’s favor. But since they demonstrate the reality of who you are in Jesus. Would you pray with me?

Jesus, we thank you for the incredible truth of what you’ve done for us because of your great love that you died for us, that you rose for us, that you removed us from enslavement to darkness. And you put us in a position of authority over the same spirits that once hauled us around in lives filled with line crossing and mark missing. That’s not us anymore. Not if we are in Christ. Lord, if there’s anyone here today who’s not in Christ, I pray that they would make that decision to take a grip, to grasp, take hold of what You’ve done for them. Lord, we are in awe of what you’ve done for us, made us alive, brought us into relationship, raised
us out of our old ways and into new, out of our old family and into new. You have seated us in the heavenly realms with power and authority.

And You’ve changed what life looks like because we are Yours now there are endless opportunities to demonstrate the reality of who we are. Remind us regularly of who we are in Christ. Stir up in us an expectation and a courage to seize the opportunities that stretch out in front of us. To embrace the activities that come with the identity so that we can grab hold of our identity in a way that cannot be taken from us. So Lord, just speak to each heart right now. Would you please reveal what that next step or two or three of embracing what it means to be the people of God looks like? In Jesus’ name. Amen.