IN CHRIST I AM
IDENTITY THEFT REBOOT
Ephesians 4:17-32 // Jerry Jones
February 5, 2017

JERRY: Well, good morning Mission Hills. If we have not met yet, my name is Jerry Jones. I’m one of the pastors on staff here at Mission Hills. I have a number of things that I’m responsible for in that capacity, but the primary role that I play is the overseer of Care & Counseling ministries. So, if you’d like more information about those ministries, I’d be glad to talk to you at the end of our service today.

Our senior pastor, Craig Smith, has been hit hard this week by an illness that has robbed him of his voice. Even as of the end of the week, he was struggling to find the ability to speak, and so he sent out the SOS and asked if I would pinch-hit for him this weekend and I want you to know that I have a deep fondness, a great love for the word of God and I counted a great privilege to be able to bring Ephesians 4 to you today.

I would just ask if you would join me for a moment and let’s ask God’s blessing upon our time in His word today. Heavenly Father, this morning, I would bring Craig before you. I would pray that your hand of healing would be upon him physically, but also that your hand of restoration would be upon him spiritually, so that he’ll be fully ready when the time comes, that he comes back to this platform and base us in the word of God. And now, for this morning, I pray that you’ll bless our time in your word. May your Holy Spirit convict us of the things we need to be convicted of and give us the strength to apply them to our lives. We pray all this in Christ’s name. Amen.

Pastor Craig has titled our current series in the letter of Paul to the church at Ephesus, “Identity Theft.” In Ephesians from Chapter 1 to the end of Chapter 6, Paul talks about our identity in Christ. As believers in the Savior, this is who you are because of Christ, and this is the enemy who would love to steal your identity if you let him. That is a key theme in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

Identity theft is a very real thing in our world, isn’t it? This past Christmas season, my wife, Leanne, was contacted on three different occasions by a watchdog organization that was notifying her that someone was trying to open charge accounts in her name. This individual or this group of individuals had even acquired, somehow, her social security number. So far, thankfully, they have been unsuccessful, because the identity theft watchdog is on duty and his bark has chased them away. And so we’re thankful for that.

Paul talks a lot about our identity in Christ in Ephesians. The next time you feel down or depressed, you’re feeling discouraged, wondering who you are or whether you have any value in this world, I would encourage you to just take your Bible and open it to Ephesians Chapter 1. You will find there a grocery list of the blessings that God has bestowed upon you if your faith is in Christ for salvation. And I’m just going to put the list on the overhead this morning. I’d like for us to review it together by repeating the phrase, “In Christ I am...” followed by the next word on the list, okay?

“In Christ, I am blessed. In Christ, I am chosen. In Christ, I am predestined. In Christ, I am adopted. In Christ, I am accepted. In Christ, I am redeemed. In Christ, I am forgiven. In Christ, I’m enlightened. In Christ, I’ve given an inheritance. In Christ, I’m sealed. In Christ, I’m assured.” How’s that for a list of blessings? Can you think of anything you might need that God has overlooked on that list? God calls you to saving faith, God saves you because of your faith in Jesus Christ, and then God protects you so that nothing prevents you from seeing heaven when you die.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 1 to say, “In light of all this wonderful blessing God has bestowed upon you, I pray for you daily.
Specifically, I asked that you will experience the full power of God released in your life.” Why would Paul feel the need to pray that prayer for us? It’s because we have an enemy. Our enemy wants to steal our identity, he wants to rob us of that power. He accomplishes that by lying to us. Our enemy takes that whole list of things we just reviewed and he repeats it back to us erroneously. He only changes a couple of words, but if we listen to him and buy into his false message, we lose our power to live to the glory of Christ. God does not bless you. God does not choose you. God does not forgive you. God will not protect you. You are not worthy. His name is Satan, and Ephesians Chapter 2 Verse 2, Paul calls him the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

So, there you have the backdrop for our passage today. Today, we are going to look at Ephesians Chapter 4 Verses 17 to 32. And you will find this passage on page 949 in the Bible that is in the pocket of the seat in front of you if you’d like to follow along this morning. In these 16 verses, Paul is calling those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ to live up to our calling. He has to issue that call because we do have other options. There are other voices that we can listen to. They are not the voice of God. They come from other places. This is a noisy world we live in, isn’t it?

I watch 9News, and then I catch about 10 minutes of the “Today Show” before I get into the car to head to work every morning. It’s only about 40, 45 minutes worth of news, but for me, it’s more than enough. Do you know what it sounds like to me? Noise. It sounds like utter chaos. Everyone has a voice, and they’re doggedly determined that that voice is going to be heard, aren’t they? And so they speak a little bit louder than everybody else, forcing everybody else to speak a little bit louder than they do and before long, all we have is a good old-fashioned shouting match.

In Ephesians Chapter 4 Verses 17 to 32, the Apostle Paul cuts right through the noise, and he says, “Christ won? One who belongs to God through faith and Jesus Christ, this is how God wants you to live.” Conversely, this is the list of things God would like you to avoid as you would with Him each day. This is a long passage, but as I studied it this week in its full context, I detected 3 keywords that tie all 16 verses together. Three simple words provide the links that hold this 16 verse chain together. Are you ready for this? This is really complicated.

“They, you, and therefore.” How’s that for a tough outline? Arguably the easiest outline I’ve ever put forth in preaching a sermon. “They, you, therefore.” Let’s talk about “They” for a moment. Who is “They” and what’s up with them according to Paul? Ephesians 4:17-19, “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking. They...” Here we go, “Are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more.”

Who’s Paul talking about in those three verses? Simply stated, he is talking about unbelievers. They are unbelievers. They are not identified with the Savior Jesus Christ because they have yet to be identified with Him through faith. Four things are true of them. They experience futility in their thinking about moral and spiritual issues. That’s why this world is so noisy. They’re alienated from the life of God, that means that they’re spiritually dead, separated from Him. They’re past feeling. They are morally insensitive to the things that matter to God and they have given themselves over to the things God calls sin. They just continually lust for more. They have an insatiable appetite for the things that defile them in God’s eyes.

This is not a pretty picture. In fact, as I studied to get ready to preach to you this morning, I really wrapped my brain. How in the world could we possibly visualize this condition together? And frankly, this dude is as close as I could come. Hell just called, they want their demons back. Look at this people, they’re absolutely terrifying. They all live in a black hole together somewhere. My mom told me nothing good ever lived in a black hole.

I want you to listen very, very carefully to what I’m about to say. I love to laugh and I think God loves it when we laugh, and I
will poke fun at a Raider fan every day and twice on Sunday. Because frankly, they deserve it, but what Paul is talking about in Ephesians Chapter 4 Verses 17 to 19 is very real. And it is really not a laughing matter. In this three verses, Paul is describing unbelievers. These are people who are created by God, they are loved by Him, so much so that He sent His only Son to die on a cross, to redeem them from sin and death, but they are far from Him. Their minds are darkened to the truth of His gospel. They have yet to come to terms with the fact that they are a sinner in need of a Savior. They are alienated from God, and if they die in this condition, make no mistake about it, it will become an eternal separation.

We do not laugh at that, we do not poke fun at that. God calls us to love the unbeliever, to be gracious toward the unbeliever. I love Mission Hill Church and the main reason I do is because as a staff, as a leadership team, we are always praying about and strategizing how we, as a church, can be more welcoming, more accommodating, to people who come here, perhaps for the first time, maybe for the very first time, coming to hear the truth about Jesus Christ. How can we make them feel more welcome, how can we make more room for them? And in fact, we have an announcement to make today, and we have a number of our staff who have presented a video to show you, right now, to make that important announcement. Take a look.

Male: As we consider our desire to make others feel at home at Mission Hills, we cannot help but to reflect on the extravagant hospitality the Father Himself showed us.

Female: I was an orphan, He called me His child.

Male: I was a stranger, He made me feel part of the family.

Female: My sin made me unclean like a leper, He did not cast me out.

Female: We are called to reach as many people as possible with the transforming work God is doing through Mission Hills.

Female: Before we create more seats, we have to address the traffic problem.

Male: When new guests turn off Broadway to see traffic backups and limited parking, it is more appealing to turn around and go out to brunch, then to wait through the congestion and navigate a new place.

Female: In fact, each week, we see people leaving.

Female: And so, we’ll be making changes, over the coming months, to respond with hospitality, to the growing attendance we’re seeing each weekend.

Male: The first of these changes is moving our 9:30 service to 9:15 a.m. starting in March.

Male: Increasing the gap between the 9:15 service and the 11:00 service will improve the first impression for our guests. Easing both the gridlocks we see on the roads and the congestion in the lobby.

Female: Our prayer is that God will use this space we’re making for others to grow His kingdom.

Female: By His grace, God makes us living testimonies of Christ’s life by this truth. We love because He first loved us.

Female: We love because He first loved us.

Male: We’re learning to make room for others because while we were apart from God, room was made for us.
JERRY: Paul says, “They are spiritually dead, they are separated from God.” But in verse 20, Paul changes his focus. He’s done talking about unbelievers, he’s now addressing Christians. How do I know that? Well, I know that because he changes pronouns. He shifts from “they” to “you.” Having described the spiritual condition of the unbeliever, Paul then says, in verses 20 to 24, “You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely, you heard of Him and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and Holiness.”

Wow. What a stark contrast between verses 17 to 19 and verses 20 to 24? We can literally go from being darkened in our understanding, hard-hearted, alienated from God to being recreated to be like God in true righteousness and Holiness. How could we possibly visualize this stark contrast? Look at this, even the good people of middle earth root for the Broncos. Some of the finest Christians you’ll ever meet root for the Broncos. Everywhere their fans go, there’s confetti, because we’re celebrating the fact that the World Champions live in our town, right? Of course, it all comes to an end today, sadly. It’s been a good year. Congratulations to Terrell Davis, right? Well deserved. Long overdue.

In Ephesians 4:17-32, Paul is drawing a contrast. It is a before and after picture. Before you met the Savior, this is what you looked like, you were ignorant of God, hard-hearted toward Him, alienated from Him. His thoughts were not your thoughts, His values were not your values. The lifestyle you were choosing was not the lifestyle that made Him happy, but the one that was fulfilling the desires of your sinful heart. You were angry, you were deceived, you were empty. You couldn’t even figure out why. All you were trying to do was to act like everybody else around you, you were just trying to fit in. But you felt hopeless, you felt depressed, you weren’t sure there was a God but if there was a God, you were quite sure you were far from Him. Can you remember those days?

In Ephesians 2, Paul says, “We were all there at one time or another.” But then something miraculously happened. Someone loved you enough to tell you the truth. Someone told you about the God who created you, who loved you enough to die on a cross for you. They told you that if you would allow Him to do so, He would forgive you of all your sin, He would restore you and your relationship with Him for all eternity. You believed that message. And on that day, you took your first step out of the darkness and into the light. You began to study God’s word. And the more you studied, the more you began to realize, God is real. He wants to transform you into the man or the woman who puts His glory on display for others to see. But it’s a process, isn’t it? It doesn’t happen overnight.

Once we step out of the darkness and into the light, we begin to see things differently. We no longer see them the way our eyes used to see them when we were blinded by our own ignorance. Now we see them the way God sees them. And all of a sudden, we realize in the light that our appearance is inappropriate for the company we want to keep. Our appearance is inappropriate for the company we want to keep.

See, when God calls us out of the darkness, we come as is. That means that we still struggle with self-centeredness, we still struggle with bad attitudes. We’re still full of anger, we’re still full of unforgiveness, our mouth is still full of vulgarity. Our Holy Righteous God calls us to walk with Him, to be in His presence, but our appearance isn’t appropriate for the company we want to keep. Think of it this way. Fellas, how many of you can tell me what’s going to happen a week from Tuesday? Holy cow, it’s quiet in here. Ladies, what’s going to happen a week from Tuesday?

CONGREGATION: Valentine’s Day.

JERRY: See, Heaven help you guys if you blow it now. Because she and God both know you’ve been reminded, okay? But fellas, let’s say you get it right. Let’s say that you remember to do something on Valentine’s Day for your sweetheart. That’s good. And let’s say you actually have a sweetheart to do something for, that’s really good, right? And let’s say, fellas, that you go all out and you make a reservation at Elway’s for you and your Valentine. She is gonna be so impressed by that because if you want a
reservation at Elway’s on Valentine’s Day, you pretty much better know John personally. Put your phones away, we got a sermon to listen to right now.

But the day comes for your big Valentine’s date at Elway’s and you get the brilliant idea to go out into the garage and put new brake pads on the car. And in the process of putting new brake pads on the car, you just get absolutely filthy. Your clothes are stained with grease, your fingers and your fingernails and your hands are black. You even managed to get brake dust in your hair somehow. And what if, in the midst of all that grimy corruption, you look at your watch and you say, “Oh my gosh, I’ve got to go, it’s time for our date.” And in your rush to race out to pick up your Valentine for your big date, you forget to take a bath. And you forget to take off those grimy dirty clothes and put on the proper clothes to go to Elway’s. And you show up to pick your date up in that condition, what is she going to say to you?

“I don’t think so, boss. You got the right day, good for you. You got the right restaurant, good for you. You certainly have the right Valentine. But you’ve got the wrong appearance. Your appearance is dirty and sloppy and inappropriate, and I don’t even think they’d let you in the door at Elway’s if you showed up looking like that. You go get showered. You change those grimy clothes. You put on the ones I laid out for you to wear, and we’ll be ready to go.”

If you can understand that illustration, you can understand what Paul is saying in Ephesians 4:17-32. They are living in filth. You are called to live in the pure white righteousness of your Savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore, here we go, verse 25, “Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for the building up of others according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.”

Fifty years ago, my mom took me to our local church to attend vacation Bible school. And the lady who was in charge of the gospel presentation that day was a little lady named Jen Shoemaker. What that woman could do with flannelgraph hell flames and little children was all inspiring. To this day, it remains the harshest gospel presentation I’ve ever heard. But Jen worked her magic that day, and all I can tell you is it worked on me.

I was never the brightest bulb in the classroom, any of my teachers will tell you that. But that day, I got it. “This is what eternity looks like if you don’t have Jesus as your Savior. Any questions?” Just one, “How do I meet this Jesus you’re talking about?” And that day, I took my first step out of the darkness and into the light, and I have been walking my Savior every day since.

Every day, I kneel at His cross and I ask one simple question, “Lord, what dirty sin-stained garment do I need to remove today, and what beautiful piece of clothing do you want to put on me that will replace it?” And Paul gives us quite a list of things to choose from, doesn’t he? I mean, there’s falsehood, and anger, and laziness, and self-centeredness, and vulgarity, and bitterness, and rage, and anger, and malice. I’ve worn all of those, and will again in the future, I’m sure. It’s just a sampling of the dirty garments God wants me to put off in order to put on the clothes he has laid out for me to wear and I am thrilled to have that opportunity. Because the Bible tells us that there is a party looming on the horizon. God alone knows the exact date, but the party is called in revelation, “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.” And it’s not an exaggeration to say that this is an epic event of cosmic proportions, because on that day, believers, followers of Jesus Christ, will be gathered from every generation, every corner of the Earth, and our purpose will be to join our voices in one accord to cry, “Holy, Holy, Holy. Worthy is the lamb that was slain.”

And even though Jesus is the guest of honor at that event, and it is truly all about Him, He has graciously invited you and He is
invited me to attend. Because that’s just the kind of God that He is. I received my invitation 50 years ago when a sweet, well-in- tended, faithful servant of God was willing to let God use her to tell children about Jesus Christ. I plan to accept that invitation, and here’s what I know for sure. When I step out of that limousine onto the red carpet that Jesus rolls out for me to walk into His presence, I want to be appropriately dressed for the company I want to keep. I don’t know who I will be there, but if Joan Rivers asks me who I’m wearing, I am not going to say series row back, garage grimy automobile mechanic clothes. I’m going to say, “I’m wearing the pure white righteousness of my Savior Jesus Christ.”

There are probably, at least, a half a dozen 30-minute sermons in those 8 verses we just read. But Pastor Craig only gave me one 30-minute slot to fill and it’s almost expired. So, let me give you the practical application of Ephesians 4:17-32. Your God, the God who created you has called you out of the darkness of sin and death, He has called you to walk with Him in the light of His truth, but your appearance must be appropriate for the company you want to keep. And so, I would simply like to leave you with two questions this morning that you can contemplate as you think about this message today, and tomorrow, and in the days that are ahead.

Number one, have you taken that step out of darkness and into truth? Have you said yes to the forgiveness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ? Here’s question number two. As you live in the light of God’s truth, as it shines upon you this morning, is it revealing any article of spiritual clothing that isn’t yet appropriate for the company you wanna keep? Is God speaking to you this morning about an attitude, or a habit, or a doubt, something that is getting in your way as you attempt to walk with God? Some article of spiritual clothing that He would have you to put off in order to put on the garment of righteousness He wants you to wear?

The worship team is going to come now and lead us in our final song, and as they sing this final song, I’m going to introduce you to 13 of my favorite people. We’re gonna do that by way of a video that we filmed last December. You are about to meet 13 men and women who have heard God call them to put off something that was keeping them defeated in their walk with Him so that they could put on the new garment God has for them to wear. These folks are all leaders in our “Celebrate Recovery” program. But they weren’t always leaders. There was a day when they had to be honest enough before God to allow His prompting to put off a garment of disobedience, in order to put on the garment of righteousness in Christ. That took tremendous courage, and now they’re courageous enough to share their story with you by way of this video, and so I will invite you, just let God speak to you as you hear our final song this morning.

I was lost
I was in chains
The world had a hold of me

My heart was a stone
I was covered in shame

When He came for me
I couldn’t run, couldn’t run from His presence
I couldn’t run, couldn’t run from His arms

Jesus, He loves me, He loves me, He is for me
Jesus, how can it be, He loves me, He is for me

It was a fire
Deep in my soul
I’ll never be the same
I stepped out of the dark
And into the light
When He called my name

I couldn’t run, couldn’t run from His presence
I couldn’t run, couldn’t run from His arms

Jesus, He loves me, He loves me, He is for me
Jesus, how can it be, He loves me, He is for me

He holds the stars and He holds my heart
With healing hands that bear the scars
The rugged cross where He died for me
My only hope, my everything

Jesus, He loves me, yes He loves me
Jesus, how can it be, He loves me, He is for me
He loves me, He loves me, He loves me
Oh, how He loves me
He loves me, He loves me, He loves me
Oh, how He loves me
He loves me, He loves me, He loves me,
Oh, how He loves me
He loves me, He loves me, He loves me.

Might be the 50th time I’ve watched that, I don’t know, every time I do, I get emotional. I only wish you could hear the story behind every one of those beautiful men and women. I’m gonna close us in prayer, and at the conclusion of my prayer, there’s gonna be people down here in the front, and they’re here to pray with you. If you have something you wanna pray about today, we want to invite you to come and connect with someone here at the front of our auditorium and spend some time praying before you head off for your big day today. And I have the privilege of announcing something now that maybe you knew, maybe you didn’t, but this is the second week that we are actually live streaming this service. So, there have been people seating in the cloud, somewhere, watching everything we’ve done this last hour, how about that? Welcome.

And we want you to know, if you’re watching us live, that we will pray with you too. If you’ll just hit “Pray” right now, we will connect with you and we will have a prayer with you as well. So, let me close this in prayer and if you want to come and connect with someone this morning, please, do so.

Heavenly Father, what a powerful passage, what a great list of blessings that you have bestowed upon us in Jesus Christ. May we learn more every day what it means to put off the old and to put on the new to your glory, that we may be appropriately addressed for the company you’ve called us to keep. Thank you that you love us enough to give us that invitation. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.