Good morning, Family. Today, we begin our new seron series called “Hello. My name is . . . “ One of the most important revelations we can get from the Word of God is to understand who we are in Christ--identifying with Christ through faith and salvation, walking in who we are in Him, in the riches of His Grace (2 Corinthians 5:17\*). New things come for us in Christ. Failing to understand our identity in Him will keep us living with fewer of the privileges we have in Him (Galatians 2:20\*\*). Understanding our identity in Him means we are raised with Christ and seated with Him in eternity. Receiving and accepting who we are in Christ changes the way we think and live. Each believer is made with eternal value and with eternity in mind:

 13 For you created my inmost being;

 you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

 your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Psalm 139)

The psalmist goes on to affirm that very day of every believer’s life is recorded in God’s book:

 **16**Your eyes saw my unformed body;
     all the days ordained for me were written in your book
     before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139)

Church! Listen!! God sees YOU. You matter. Ecclesiastes tells us that He has set eternity in our hearts. He sees in us eternal value. How would your life change if you began to see yourself, in awe and humility, the way the One who created you sees you?

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\*2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

\*\* Galatians 2:20

20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

 In our Old Testament reading today, we meet Gideon. Gideon is a judge, a prophet, and a military leader. And he is usually full of faith. But when we meet him, he’s doubting, fearful, and he is hiding from a formidable enemy. The Midianites are attacking and oppressing Israel. Gideon, meanwhile, is “threshing” wheat in a winepress. Now traditionally, grain is separated from its stalks with the aid of the wind. Chaff blows away. Gideon’s effort is ineffective at best, silly distraction at worse. He is hiding from his responsibilities, gripped by fear and doubt, even though God’s angel calls him “mighty warrior” (verse 12). God sees Gideon for who he is. And Christian, God see you! He sees me! He sees each of us as we are right now and who we are each becoming.

 But like Gideon, many of us respond by dismissing the Word of God. We feel and show no awe (verse 12-13 and 15). Gideon initially rejects the identity God gives him and responds by asserting his own understanding of himself. Such a response defies the truth that you and I each have an eternal purpose before anyone (including ourselves) has an opinion. God calls Abraham the father of nations before Abraham has even one child. He calls Moses the deliverer of Israel while Moses hides in the desert, having run from a manslaughter charge in Egypt. Jesus calls Peter—the least consistent and most explosive of the apostles—the Rock and says upon this Rock He will build His church. In each case, the believer becomes what God says he will, and each begins to believe in himself—his purpose in God’s plan. Likewise, when we take God at His word, we begin to agree with Him; we begin to see and to live in Him.

 Gideon tests God three times, then does his will, destroying the altars of Baal with courage and in obedience. What does this mean for us? As Gideon discovers who God is, he also discovers more about himself. The blessing of grace is evident throughout this exchange—submission for purpose and salvation. Gideon accepts what God says about Him: Gideon’s past, his earthly circumstances, his fear do not define Him. God alone gets to define Gideon. God alone gets to define us, causing us to overcome insecurity. We receive assurance because of our dependence upon Christ. This dependence upon Christ means that He helps us conquer negativity and insecurity. Our identity should be wrapped up in our profound dependence upon God. Understanding and accepting that dependence is crucial for our discipleship and spiritual development. Just as Gideon learns of his eternal value from the God who sees him and patiently guides him to be the warrior he is meant to be, in Christ we find and can enjoy our eternal value.

 Family, listen. The purchaser of a good or service determines its value. In 2011, a painting called “The Card Players” by Impressionist Paul Cezanne sold for $250 million. I’d rather have the pictures of the dogs shooting pool, but the purchaser determines the value. The baseball in my hand is worth about $5. In the hands of Nolan Ryan, it is worth a cool $70 million. The football I hold is worth about $12 bucks. In Tom Brady’s hand, it suddenly becomes worth $250 million. This basketball is worth about $25, but in Steven Curry’s hands, it is worth $160 million. These values result from the understanding of the purchasers. An everyday claw hammer may be worth about $20, but in a carpenter’s hands, it makes a good living. These nails in my hands cost about .68 cents each. But the nails in the hands and feet of our Savior . . . Well, 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, “you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.” Luke writes in Acts 20:28. “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God,[a] which he bought with his own blood.” You, my church family, and all were made with eternity in mind. My prayer is that, in awe and humility, each of us sees our value through the Holy lens of God. Gideon provides a good example: Your past doesn’t get to define you, nor do your fears, nor do your current circumstances. You are not the sum total of your emotions; you are not the sum of your successes or failures. Your value is determined by your purchaser. Jesus Christ bought you and paid for you and for all.

PASSAGES IN SUPPORT OF THIS SERMON

PSALM 139:13-14

13 For you created my inmost being;

 you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

 your works are wonderful,

 I know that full well.

JUDGES 6:1-24

Gideon

6 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. 2 Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds. 3 Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples invaded the country. 4 They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. 5 They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. 6 Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.

7 When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, 8 he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 9 I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. 10 I said to you, ‘I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”

11 The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. 12 When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”

13 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

14 The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

15 “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

16 The Lord answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”

17 Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. 18 Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”

And the Lord said, “I will wait until you return.”

19 Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah[a] of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

20 The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And Gideon did so. 21 Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the Lord disappeared. 22 When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, “Alas, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!”

23 But the Lord said to him, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.”

24 So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord Is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.