

Introduction

Yesterday I was at the airport. No, it wasn't to get on a plane, or get off one. For the first time in many, many, years it was to put someone else on one. You see, Becky, my 18-year old daughter, who just graduated high school, is on her way to Auckland, New Zealand, to attend a culinary school. Right now she will be passing Fiji and is just a few hours from arriving in New Zealand.

It's a really emotional time isn't it? You take this little baby, that you've loved and nurtured for 18 years, and you send them off to a place where they will start building a whole new life - without you. It's this turning point in their lives. Their life is no longer focused on their childhood, of which we were the controllers, but on their future, where we become irrelevant.

Has anyone had that experience in the last few weeks? Raise your hands. I know a lot of you have! If you're watching online why not type in the chat where your baby is off to. Tell us how many tears you shed. And, if you're really honest - tell us whether they were tears of sadness, or joy!

Becky's going to live with my Brother Sam in Auckland. And I was like "tag, you're it. No backsies. She's your problem now!" But seriously - we will really miss her. Just not her moods and her messes!

Who God Says You Are

Today we are wrapping up our current teaching series. It's been based on a book called "Who God Says You Are" by Kyle Snodgrass. We've been exploring the things that make up our identity and especially at the ways that the Christian life influences that.

Now Kerri, our Children's Director, has been trying to keep the kids lined up with us as we go, and the other week she sent out water tattoos to the kids that say "I am God's Masterpiece". Are any of the kids wearing their tattoos? Stand up and show us? What about online? If you have one of these tattoos why not write it in the chat box.

You Are Your Future

Today's topic - our final topic in this series - is called "You Are Your Future." It's very fitting that we end with this topic this week in light of all our 18 years old taking this next step in their life journey and heading into their futures.

Kyle's thesis in this chapter of the book is that "The future pulls at our identity." He says that our identity is shaped and influenced by our dreams, and our goals, and our vision of the future. If our vision of the future is weak, uncertain and futile, then our identity is diminished. But if our vision of the future is strong and exciting, then our identity is expanded and strong.

And we see this in our kids at this time of transition don't we? If they have a sense of certainty and positiveness about their future then it emboldens them and gives them courage. Becky has allowed her view of her future to shape her. She is not just going to learn about baking, she is

going to become a baker - no, she is already a baker and she is going to learn how to be a GREAT baker! As if my waist line can handle any more of that!

While it is true that all your past acts, experiences and decisions make you the person that you are today - they do not need to determine the person that you become tomorrow. But if you don't have the right view of the future, you will be unable to break away from the past and it will hold you down.

To explain this I want to offer you three imperatives. First, we must hold a correct vision of our future - a God-given and biblically accurate vision. Second, we must have hope in that future. And third, we must act now in light of that future.

1. We must hold a correct vision of our future

For the last 100 years or so the church has had a problem. You may have heard me talk about this before. The problem is that we have reduced the Gospel message to be a fraction of what it should be. We've taught people that if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ then he will forgive your sins and take you to heaven when you die, or sooner - if he comes back before then. And while this is all correct, it isn't the fullness of the Gospel message that we find in scripture.

Now don't get me wrong - I'm not opposed to this aspect of the Christian message. I'd imagine that if I had been in Afghanistan recently then having a guaranteed ticket to the last flight out of Kabul would have been incredibly valuable. But this isn't why thousands of Afghanis and their families assisted the allied forces over the years. They weren't looking merely for an exit plan - they believed that by helping the allies, they could help change the future of their beloved country. They didn't want an exit plan, they wanted a better life for themselves, their family and their people. It's unfortunate that not enough of their people, including their armed forces and government, felt strongly enough to resist the Taliban again.

The gospel message is like this too. It's not merely about an exit plan, or fire insurance, it's about an entirely new vision for the world. When you think about it, the personal relationship view is incredibly selfish - it's all about what's in it for me, and what I get out of it. But there's so much more.

Kyle Snodgrass puts it this way:

Christianity has a *large* vision for the future, the only vision worth having, one that brings meaning, purpose, and hope, for it is about seeing God, knowing God, and unending participation with God.

When Jesus came to Galilee his message was that the Kingdom of God was here - now. His message had much more to do with changing your present reality than it did with what happens when you die. In fact, he made this one statement that I don't think that most Christians fully understand. John records in chapter 10, verse 10. He says "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The coming of the Kingdom of God means not merely eternal life or

life after death, but fullness of life here and now. The future component of his message changes our present reality.

Now we're going to explore some of these themes in our next series, so for the purposes of this message I just want to highlight some of what scripture says about our future. The Apostle Paul has a lot to say about this. In his first letter to the church in Corinth - who seemed to be very argumentative and focussing on personal issues a lot of the time - he has to challenge them on a number of matters. In chapters 3 and 6 he starts using a phrase that shows us just how little they understood. He says "Do you not know?"

Do you not know?

He attacks their faulty thinking about their common life together, the way they deal with their own sexuality, and even the way that they treat each other. And in many cases he uses this phrase "do you not know" as a way of suggesting that if they only understood the truth they would behave differently. Because they do not fully understand their future and status in God's kingdom, their present is being wasted. Here's some of the things that Paul says to them:

- 1Co 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?
- 1 Co 6:2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?
- 1 Co 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels
- 1 Co 6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?
- 1 Co 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

He goes on in Romans, as does Peter and John:

- Rom 8:16-17 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.... we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ
- 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."
- Rev 5:10 "You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth"

Our future is not merely going to heaven, but as co-heirs and co-rulers with Jesus. In fact, many Christians miss the fact that at the end of the book of Revelation, the believers don't go off to heaven, but heaven comes to earth. Our future is far more interesting than we have been led to believe. And I don't even fully understand it - but I know that it requires something more of me than saying a prayer or believing the right things.

When my view of God's kingdom, and my future part in it, is correct, it changes the way that I see my present and calls me forward.

2. We must have hope in the future

This brings us to my second imperative - that we must have hope in the future. Now the word Hope in English is pretty soft. It suggests that the future is uncertain and that our desire is subject to luck or circumstance. This is not the biblical use of the word hope!

The better word here is Faith. Faith involves a sense of certainty - not merely that it might come to pass, but that it WILL come to pass. The difference here is huge.

Hope is not a wispy dream but a solid conviction based on God's promise. This is why having a correct view of these promises is so important. Kyle Snodgrass puts it like this:

Hope is the conviction that the promises of God will be accomplished, that God will be revealed as God, that Christ will gather his people and be Lord of all, and that we will be restored to the glory humans should have because we are the image of God.

I'm preparing for our semester class on the Book of Hebrews and Hebrews chapter 11 has this amazing catalog of people of Faith. The author introduces it by saying "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Heb 11:1) Then he lists off all these saints of old who lived by faith. He makes this strange statement in v13 "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance." Having faith doesn't mean that we are going to get what we want - it means that God will deliver what he has promised in his time.

Victor E. Frankl, a Holocaust survivor said "It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future... The prisoner who had lost faith in the future - his future - was doomed." If the man in the concentration camp merely hoped for a better outcome, he lost his will to live. He had to have faith. Even though many of them lost their lives, it was the faith that the world would actually change that gave them strength.

In Hebrews 11 the author continues with this long list of people who had faith and yet didn't receive what had been promised. Not my preferred way of motivating people. But then in 12:2 he wraps it up like this:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

What does he mean by this? He is reminding us that while the saints of old did not get to see God deliver on their promise - WE HAVE! We have seen Jesus, God's total and complete fulfillment, through his death and resurrection he has taken control of all things. Therefore, as we continue in our daily struggles we don't have mere hope that God will prevail, we have the certainty that he HAS already prevailed because we have seen the one who will bring all things under his control.

This is what it means to live by faith as a follower of Jesus. This is the kind of hope in the future that we need. One that knows that this full and correct vision of the future we have, that this is

guaranteed - no uncertainty, because Jesus has already conquered. This, by the way, is the message of Revelation.

3. We must act now in light of our future

My final imperative is that we must act now in the light of our future. If we see this future as mere possibility, we are passive - waiting for it to happen to us. But if we see it as certain, then we have the confidence to begin bringing it into being even now.

When Becky got on that plane yesterday, she was acting now in light of her future. She wasn't hoping that one day she would be the great baker that she hoped she would be. She saw her future as certain, and stepped into it.

This is how we are to live the Christian life. Jesus and the early church taught that the future had invaded the present and determines how life in the present is lived. The early church likewise asserted that the "end of the ages" had come upon them. The future is already here! Kyle Snodgrass puts it like this:

With Christianity many of the benefits of God's future are already present and impacting life. Eternal life, new birth, forgiveness, reconciliation, justification/acquittal, the pouring out of the Spirit, and much more--all items belonging to the end of the age--are all present possessions.

When my Bible class studied the book of Acts, we talked about the inbreaking of the kingdom. The idea that this new Jesus community was bringing about the Kingdom of God everywhere they went. This is another way of saying that they were bringing the future into the present.

When I last preached, back in March, on the question "What Do You Want Me To Do For You?" I talked a little bit about the Lord's Prayer, and the line "Your Kingdom Come, your will be done - on earth as it is in heaven." I'm going to repeat myself here. Not just in case you missed it, or you forgot, but because it's especially relevant to this topic.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray he didn't teach them to pray "Prepare your Kingdom out there in heaven, and take me to it when it's ready." He didn't suggest that we pray "No one does your will in this place - get me outa here." He taught us to pray that God would bring his kingdom FROM heaven TO earth.

One of the really interesting things in the Lord's Prayer is the grammar. The "petitions" of the prayer are not wishes - things that we hope, maybe, someday, might happen if we're good enough or lucky enough. No. They are actually commands. Think about that. Jesus taught us to COMMAND GOD. Such a bold prayer REQUIRES that we believe that this is possible and that God wants to do it. This so-called petition is not a mere request, it is a command. "BRING your kingdom to us! That perfect will that is imposed in heaven, bring it to earth and impose it here. Now!"

I described this prayer as a dangerous prayer! To pray like this is to give God total permission, no, to demand, that he invade our reality here - and now - starting with you, with me, with us! To pray like this means to give up your desires and preferences, your dreams and goals, and to allow God to replace them with his - and then to go out and help bring them into reality.

This is what it means to act now in light of our future. To be part of bringing that future into reality. To be a servant of God's kingdom, expanding his reign here on earth in everything that you do and everywhere that you go.

Implementation

So how do we do this? How do we live our lives in such a way we bring this real and guaranteed future into the present?

Well, funny you should ask - because that, in part, is what our next series is all about! It's called "Signposts of Hope in a Suffering World." We'll be exploring seven themes, or "signposts" from John's gospel that will help point us in the right direction. Whether you're with us on line or in person, you won't want to miss it.

But in the mean time, here's something that I want you to think and pray about. As important as our gathering together is - and it really is important - the real work happens out there - in the world. It happens the other six and a half days. It happens in your homes, and in your schools, and in your workplaces. It happens in coffee shops, and on busses, and on the streets. It happens in the seemingly small everyday things as much as in the momentous things.

And my challenge to you is to ask God this question every day: "How will you use me today?" And then to be attentive and obedient to the Holy Spirit as he guides and directs you to bring God's reign and kingdom to bear in your everyday.

Conclusion

That brings our series on "Who God Says You Are" to a close. The desire of our staff and the preaching team has been to help you explore your own personhood and identity from a biblical perspective so that you may firmly Establish your Identity in Jesus. Don't forget that if you have missed any of the messages in this series they are all available for viewing on our website.

And one of the ways that Christians have, for the last 2000 years, declared their identity is through baptism. Today we are excited to have our first line, in-person, baptisms for over 18 months! I'd like to invite Mia and Keira, and Pastor Steve, to come up to the stage now.

Baptism is an important step in every Christian's journey. It commemorates that turning point when each believer says that they have decided to Join Jesus on His Mission, and to forever more be identified with Him. The confession reminds us that we belong to him and believe in him, and look to him for our identity, meaning and purpose. And the water reminds us that as we identify with Jesus, our sins are washed away, we will be with Jesus when we die, but also that we will reign with him forever.

Mia and Kiera, congratulations on taking this brave and bold step. I'll let Steve take it away.

Benediction

As we depart this morning - to join Jesus in His Mission to bring God's Kingdom into our present reality - out there, I want to leave you with the words of the four living creatures and 24 elders from Revelation 5 who sang:

"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth."

If you are following Jesus and you haven't been baptised before, I want to encourage you to consider signing up for our next baptisms on Thanksgiving Sunday. Just fill in the form or speak to one of our pastors.

Thanks for being part of our worship experience today.