

Intro: All of us know the fear and anxiety that swells up when we are told, in one fashion or another, that we do not belong or that we are not accepted. In our striving to be somebody, to prove our worth, we work extremely hard to show that we are worthy to be accepted, so that we can finally belong. Michael Jackson stated as much in his comment about growing up as a child star: “People who grew up as child stars have the same thing in common. You're cute, they love you; you go through the awkward stage, they don't accept you anymore.” This isn't just true of child stars, is it?

Jackson's fellow performer and star, Madonna, also felt the weight of proving her worth when she told Vogue magazine in 1994, “My drive in life comes from the fear of being mediocre. That's always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being, but then I feel that I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I've become somebody, I still have to prove that I'm somebody. My struggle in never ended and I guess it never will.”

This sense of belonging, and of performance-based acceptance, permeates our souls down to the core. Our nature cries out to be significant, but the world today has nothing to offer other than the stones of legalism and performance based religion. But Christ is different. You see, Christianity is the only religion where belonging precedes the performance. When a person puts his or her faith in Christ, they belong to God and are seen as Christ is seen: righteous, blameless, holy, and acceptable. With this belonging, then, comes a renewed heart to obey the Lord out of gratitude and love, not out of a desire to be accepted or loved. By God's grace, that is His abundant provision of salvation and blessing poured out upon us solely because He desires to, not because of what we have performed or accomplished for Him, we are included into His family through simply trusting in His Son. Performance-based acceptance, legalism or self-righteousness, do actually produce greater godliness or obedience which pleases the Lord. But obedience out of grace does. Listen to Walter Marshall:

“He makes us first to be in Christ by faith, as branches in the vine, that we may bring forth much fruit (John 15:4-5). He first purges our consciences from dead works by justification, that we may serve the living God (Heb. 9:14). He makes us to first live in the Spirit, then walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25)....Now, mark well the great advantages you have for the attainment of holiness, by seeking it in a right gospel order. You will have the advantage of the love God manifested toward you, in forgiving your sins, receiving you into favor, and giving you the spirit of adoption, and the hope of His glory, freely, through Christ, to persuade and constrain you, by sweet allurements, to love God again, who has so dearly loved you, and to love others for His sake, and to give up yourselves to the obedience of all His commands out of hearty love to Him.”

As our story continues today in the redemptive romance of Ruth, Boaz asks the question: “to whom does she belong?” Ruth's character and behavior reveal who she really is and to whom she truly belongs. So, as we hear the Word today, ask yourself the same question: “to whom do I belong? Can people tell by my character and my behavior?” Because we belong to Christ and are accepted by God based upon His gracious provision of Jesus in our place, we now obey without fear but rather in grateful love. So, then, you who are accepted by God and belong to Christ, let us live in character and in behavior in such a way that shows we are His and that we are saved by His grace to the glory of God.

1. To Whom Do You Belong?

- a. Boaz inquires about Ruth's identity
 - i. “To whom does this young woman belong?”
 1. Belonging
 2. “young woman”
 - a. Indicates that Boaz was older
 - b. It was strange to see a young woman gleaning alone
 - ii. In the ANE, one's family was determinative authority
 - iii. Boaz wants to know if she “belongs to anyone”

1. Father?
2. Husband?
- iv. Gen 38:25
- v. 1 Sam 30:13
- vi. Jonah 1:8
- b. His inquiry reads as a deep interest in her
 - i. He notices her among all the others
 - ii. Something is different
 - iii. He is intrigued by her
 1. Song of Songs 2:2 – “Like a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the maidens.”
 2. Pr. 31:30-31 – “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD shall be praised. Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”
- c. To Whom do You Belong?
 - i. Is 43:1
 - ii. Romans 8:14-17
 - iii. Galatians 3:26ff
 - iv. 1 Cor 3:23

2. Can People Tell by Your Character?

- a. Boaz’s foreman responds to his question with interesting information
 - i. Where she came from and where she has come
 1. Moabite
 - a. land of foreign gods, enemy of YHWH and His people
 - b. This is who she WAS
 2. Moabite who returned
 - a. She has come to YHWH and to His land and people
 - b. This sense of “returning” indicates her change of heart AND life
 - c. She has chosen the LORD over her own people and their gods
 - d. This is who she IS
 - ii. The way in which she has come to Israel
 1. Returned with Naomi from Moab
 - a. This indicates her redeemability by Boaz: family of Elimelech
 - b. Also shows her heart of love and service, the mark of a beautiful and transformed character
 - c. This return with grace showed that she is GOOD
 2. Her reputation seemed to be known around town
- b. How Are You Known Around Town?
 - i. What do your choices reveal about to whom you belong?
 1. Do people know you came from the City of Man and are going to the City of God?
 2. Does your character reveal itself as one who graciously serves others?
 3. Does your character reveal that you have left your former ways and are clinging to Christ in the present, despite the costs?
 - ii. 1 Tim 3:7 – An overseer must be well thought of by outsiders...
 - iii. Acts 24:16 – Always striving to have a clear conscience before God and men.

3. Can People Tell by Your Behavior?

- a. Boaz's foreman recounts Ruth's hardworking behavior
 - i. She asked permission to glean (humble words)
 - 1. She wasn't just humble in her mind or heart
 - 2. She spoke with humility and acted accordingly
 - ii. She worked very hard (humble actions)
 - 1. She's been on her feet all day, except to sit down "a little" in the shelter
 - 2. She obviously made quite an impression on this young man
 - a. Matt 5:16 – Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.
 - 3. It takes great humility to work hard and not expect recognition
 - a. Questions:
 - i. How often do you work less hard because nobody is watching?
 - ii. How often do you get irritated because nobody notices your hard work?
 - b. "Character is what you are in the dark." – D.L. Moody
- b. Can People Tell to Whom You Belong by Your Behavior?
 - i. Humble words
 - ii. Humble actions
 - iii. Self-forgetting behavior and expectations
 - 1. Expending yourself for the sake of others
 - 2. Doing the works of God without a need to be recognized

4. God's Grace Means that You Belong to Him Through Faith in Jesus Christ Before You Perform Any Good

- a. Christianity is the only religion/worldview where the verdict comes before the evidence: Calling before walk
 - i. **Eph 2:4-10**
 - ii. **Col 3:1ff**
- b. In every other religion/worldview the evidence must be conclusive for the verdict
 - i. Every time we accomplish something we think "Now I'm somebody!" We've got the verdict! Our ego, however, cannot be satisfied. We think that we can get it from what people have said, our position of success (however that is defined), etc. But we never really get the verdict big enough for our ego, so Madonna states it well, "My struggle in never ended and I guess it never will."
 - ii. Every religious and irreligious person seeks the verdict that will fill up their sense of significance. Only Christianity gives a person worth, value, and significance based upon a promise and not upon their performance. Only in Christ do we get the verdict of "accepted" and "significant" *before* we gain the evidence to justify ourselves!
- c. This isn't just the way religion works, it's the way the human heart works, trying to perform in order to be somebody

5. The Reason We Do Good is *Because* of the One Who Purchased Us with His Blood

- a. This does not mean that performing good works is not important: it is commanded
- b. However, it is commanded to sons and daughters, not to slaves and orphans
- c. Because we belong to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are to walk like children of God who were bought with a price so precious
 - i. **1 Cor 6:19-20** Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

- ii. **1 Peter 1:14-16** As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."
- iii. **2 Corinthians 7:1** Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.
- iv. **1 Peter 2:24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.
- v. **Romans 6:1-7** What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.⁶ We know that our old self¹ was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.⁷ For one who has died has been set free¹ from sin.

6. What does it look like to live like this?

- a. A person that lives this kind of faith is way off of the map of what we're used to and what the world can even fathom. It doesn't make sense to the world.
 - i. This person's confidence and joy is not based upon his performance, or lack of performance, but upon JC's performance upon the cross and His risen presence upon the throne over the entire Universe.
 - ii. Confidence is in Jesus and His work so she PRAISES JESUS and HIS WORK
- b. This person is never hurt badly by criticism (doesn't bother him, isn't devastated, doesn't keep him up late)
 - i. Putting too much stock in what other people think and we're not trusting in the work and the reign of Jesus *right now*.
 - 1. The world may not care what others think, but they answer criticism by saying "I know what I think and that's what's important." (They fit Reality into their souls' desires).
 - 2. So, you have either a person devastated by criticism (thinking too much of what others think) or a person who can't accept criticism (thinking too much of what they think)
 - ii. We don't know how to heal fear except with pride, and that's a horrible nuisance to us, too
- c. A boldly humble person accepts criticism and is not devastated by it
 - i. My personal and particular sins are *so great that Jesus had to die* to remove them
 - 1. I am honest and completely transparent in my weakness and need for Jesus *presently and for eternity*
 - ii. Jesus loves me enough that *He did die* to remove them
 - 2. I am at rest and confident in Jesus' provision for my complete redemption *presently and for eternity*
- d. This person steps out and takes risks for Jesus, because even if she should fail, her performance does not determine her acceptance before God, for Christ loves her unfathomably
 - i. When she is successful, she is not proud or harsh, but rather humble and gentle, seeing that Jesus is the one who is performing any real and lasting change within others, not her.
 - 1. All that she is called to do is proclaim and humbly live out the gospel
 - 2. Jesus gets the glory for ALL the good in our lives, performed or passive!
 - ii. When he fails, he knows that his performance does not determine God's possession or acceptance of Him, so he can leave his self-reliance behind and to simply depend on his Savior's work and deep, deep love. His verdict is still secure in His redeemer, and God's plan is never squelched by our failures. So he takes another great risk for the Lord.
 - 1. Jesus' love is stronger than our failure and His grace greater than our sin!
 - 2. That is the reason for joy in the midst of the struggle: Jesus is our righteousness!

Conclusion:

You belong to Jesus Christ! He is your Savior and your Master, your Husband and your God. He has endeavored with severe love to save you, to draw near to you, to bring you up into the heavenlies by His grace. There is no reason to fear when you put your trust in Him. He gave His life so that you would live. As obedient children of God, then, let us see that we walk in-line with the truth of the Gospel to which we have been called. Make it a point to closely examine the severity and the depth of the sin within you, your will to power and self-righteousness, to trust your feelings and your own wisdom rather than the revealed Word of your Father. Let the HS work His magic of conviction and the reminder of His radical gracious love within your heart. This is what repentance means, from confession to utter joyful desired and dependent obedience. God set His love upon you because He chose to, and He doesn't change His mind.

We are called by grace, saved by grace, adopted by grace, loved by grace, made heirs by grace, and glorified by grace. Walk like ones who don't deserve the verdict, yet are confident that we have been declared righteous, adopted by God, and given these wondrous riches in Jesus by grace through faith. Walk in bold humility. Walk with Jesus, love Him, see Him, worship Him, and boast in Him and His love to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to purify your hearts and the desires that well up within you, transforming your affections and trust until Jesus becomes so overwhelmingly large to your heart's eyes that you will give all of your idols away for one more day in His presence. Take heart as you struggle knowing this: He is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power of His Holy Spirit working within us. May our work and our reputation lead people to the One to whom we belong: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory in our lives, in our relationships, in our church, forever and ever.