

You Can Begin Again

When You Know Your Identity

Pastor Derwin L. Gray – September 3, 2017

1. Open in prayer:

- Abba, out of the goodness of Your infinite, covenantal love, You have adopted us in and through the work of Jesus, by the Spirit's power. Give us the faith to be faithful to You in our trying times; conform us into the image of Your Son, so the joy and mission of Your Son would become ours. Daily root us in our new identity. In Jesus' Name, amen.

2. Discuss the following statement made by Pastor Derwin: You can begin again when you realize, "Our reputation (what others think of us) is not as important as our new identity in Christ (who we really are). Discipleship begins when we untangle reputation and identity, and when what God thinks of us is more important than what we think of ourselves or what others think of us." ¹

- The story of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, is a story of beginning again because Joseph chose to walk in his identity in God, instead of a reputation given to him by his Jewish religious community. Read Matthew 1:18-21 and discuss.

3. We can 'Begin Again' when we remain faithful to God when it's hard.

- Pastor Derwin said, "By faith in Christ, you must know that your identity is more important than your reputation. Here's the background:

- o Joseph's reputation was that of a Tsadiq (tsa-DEEK) – one who studies the Torah seriously. This means Joseph recited the Shema daily (Deuteronomy 6:4), he followed the Jewish food laws, he financially supported the synagogue, and he celebrated the Jewish high holy days. For a Jewish man to be called a Tsadiq was a great honor. Joseph's reputation as Tsadiq is about to be challenged because of Mary, his fiancé. ²

- o In the Jewish world of the first-century, for Mary to be pregnant outside of marriage, she would be considered a na'ap (adulteress). Surely a Tsadiq like Joseph would never ruin his reputation by marrying Mary, the na'ap. If Joseph were to marry Mary, he'd gain a new reputation in Jewish society, he now be known as an Amha-aretz: one who does not observe the Torah, doesn't tithe, eats pork and will hang out with Gentiles. ³

- o If Mary was raped, the rapist could be stoned to death according to Torah. If Mary had an affair, her and her lover could be stoned to death according to Torah (Deuteronomy 22:23-29).

- By faith, Joseph believed that Mary was telling the truth, that God the Holy Spirit impregnated her with the Messiah. By faith, Joseph gives up his reputation so he can take up his new identity.

- Spend a few minutes discussing what Joseph experienced.

- Pastor Derwin asked, "By faith in Christ, will you turn exclusively to the Lord for your identity?"

- o For us to begin again, by faith, we must know that we are Abba's child. Our identity in Christ and the life of Christ, fueled by the Holy Spirit, gives us confidence and power to remain faithful to God. Read Galatians 4:4-7.

¹Scot McKnight, Jesus Creed (Paraclete Press: Brewster, 2004), 76.

²Ibid., 77.

³Ibid., 78.

o Pastor Derwin said, "We are adopted children of our Abba because of His Son, Jesus. God the Father sent Jesus to pay for our adoption into His family. The perfect sinless life of Christ paid for us. The cross of Christ paid for us. The resurrection of Christ paid for us. And God the Holy Spirit indwelling us, sealed us as God's children eternally." Discuss.

o Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. Our identity as Abba's children empowers us to love our brothers and sisters in the family of Jesus. And it fuels us to reach those who are yet to be adopted into God's family. Discuss.

o Paul continued his discussion of the privileges that believers receive as full heirs of Abraham through Christ. Paul used the familial metaphor "adoption" of our salvation while John and Peter used the familial metaphor "born again." The adoption metaphor was used primarily in two contexts in Roman culture. In Roman law, adoption was very difficult. A long, involved and expensive legal procedure, once enacted adoption afforded several special rights and privileges: (1) all debts were cancelled; (2) all criminal charges were dropped; (3) they could not be legally put to death by their new father; and (4) they could not be disinherited by their new father. In legal terms, they were a completely new person. Paul was alluding to the believers' security in Christ by using this Roman legal procedure (cf. Rom. 8:15, 23). When a father publicly adopted a son, he officially and permanently became his heir. Also, the metaphor was used in the official ceremony of a boy becoming a man, held on the 17th of March each year.

Utley, R. J. (1997). Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians (Vol. Volume 11, pp. 45-46). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

4. Pastor Derwin said, "Joseph becomes like the Am ha-aretz in the eyes of the tsadiqim to provide room for a baby boy who gives the Am ha-aretz an identity better than the tsadiqim." ⁴

• Read Romans 3:22-24.

o Through the faithfulness of Jesus—His life, death and resurrection—all who believe in Him are declared to be as righteous as Jesus Himself. As Abba's children, we are the very righteousness of Jesus, which now allows us to not only see ourselves as God sees us, but, also changes how we relate to our brothers and sisters in the family of God. Discuss.

o Note: Many Jews believed there was a distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Because Gentiles were not "under the law" (see note on 2:12), Jews regarded them as unclean. The Apostle Peter shared this perspective when he arrived at the house of a Gentile named Cornelius (Acts 10:27-28). However, once he saw that God had given the Spirit to Gentiles, just as He had to Jews, he realized that God did not make distinctions based on race (Acts 10:34, 45). ⁵

Close in prayer.

⁴ Ibid., 81-82

⁵ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (Ro 3:22). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.