

Topic	Identity in Christ
Reference	1 John 3:1-3
Date	12 May 2019
Speaker	Julia Stillwell

We all have identity and place in the family. Our ultimate identity is found in being a child of God and that is what we are and that is what we sang today and that was our scripture. We are children of God and I want you to really claim that today while we talk about other kinds of identities.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1)

This is just amazing that God calls us his children. That is the beginning of our identity. Now if we are looking at identity as heirs and how God sees us, we really have to begin by understanding grace because that is the next part of being an heir of a loving father, is understanding grace. So I have a story for you of how I came to understand grace in a way that I never had before.

About seven years ago or so, we found that my uncle Mark was dying, and he knew he was dying, and the family was preparing for this. Now I didn't know him at all, I really didn't know him. He had been the host of my family on events when I was very young. My older siblings knew him very well but I didn't and then when I was an adult my parents encouraged me to get to know him and make the trip up to New York and visit him, at least call him, at least send a card, but I did not. I am not proud of that. In fact, I stand here today and I had a lot of guilt because I didn't know my uncle Mark and he was dying and now it was too late but I was just a little kid when my family visited, so that was my excuse.

So in Amsterdam, New York, my family had visited, I have not and the years went by and because of my place in the family we were told that we would receive a gift. He had written his will and in his state we would all receive a gift and we were shocked. Well I was shocked, I didn't even know this man, whom am I to get a gift from him, I don't deserve this, I haven't done anything and you are going to give me a gift. I was shocked and the guilt was even worse, I felt terrible that he had listed me in his will to receive a gift and I had not been a good niece. I had not been very attentive to him, never even sent him a birthday card through the years and that made me feel very guilty and sad. I knew about my uncle Mark, I knew that he loved his church and I knew that he was a founding member of his

church. I knew that he loved the lord, I knew that he loved Jesus Christ and I knew that he loved God's people, I knew he was the choir director of his church and I knew he loved music, but I knew these things because my mother told me about her brother. I didn't know him but I heard these great stories about my uncle Mark and how he loved the Lord and how he loved music.

My gift that I was going to receive was undeserved but other people did deserve this gift. My brothers who were older had a relationship with uncle Mark and they had kept up with him through the years and they had visited him and I thought they deserve a gift. They should be in the will if he chooses to give them money that would make sense, but not me, it didn't make sense.

The gift could not be earned, I couldn't suddenly love him more or be a better niece or go visit him and get more money. On the other hand because I wasn't a good niece and I wasn't attentive to our relationship; I didn't get less. I would get the same gift as my brother and my other siblings and everyone in the family. This undeserved gift didn't make sense to me. It helped me understand grace.

There was a picture of a newspaper clipping of my uncle's obituary. My name was written there. Just like my name is written in the government records for the state of New York that I would be his heir and receive this gift. So keep this in mind as we look at how our name is written in the book of life with our loving God. So just because who I am I would get a gift, just because my parents had me and just because my mother happens to be his sister I get a gift. I didn't do anything. All I did was be born and I got this gift.

Now all I had to do was accept it. I got some paperwork from the attorneys that were handling his estate and they had me to give my correct address that's all I had to do to accept the gift. Well he died and we went to the memorial service in New York and it was an amazing trip. Our trip was paid for by our uncle too, he arranged it previously also. Flying to New York again I had overwhelming sadness and guilt because I never took the trip when he was alive. Now I was going because he paid for all of us to go to his memorial service in New York. It was a wonderful service because it was a celebration of his life. Because he was a music director of his church, the choir sang and there was even a gospel message. It was a powerful service as we celebrated his life, but then the most amazing thing happened. People wanted to run up and meet me who they never had met before because they heard about me from my uncle. Who am I? I am nothing. I am the little niece that never visited him but they knew him and they wanted to meet me.

Again, I was so humbled by this. These wonderful people are the ones that were his friends. They were his life group. They had studied the Bible with him, laughed with him, cried with him and ultimately, they were the ones who cared for him in his dying days. They were his family and yet they wanted to meet me, so I was overwhelmed again by grace and what this meant that just because I am my parents' daughter I have a place in the front row in this memorial service that I don't deserve and earn.

So this is what we see in my story about being an heir. It is undeserved, it could not be earned, nothing I can do to get more money or as stubborn as I was as a child, I didn't get less. It was received because of my identity, my place in the family just by being born. It was secure, nothing can ever change in this. It is written in the government records in the state of New York and there is one more thing I didn't tell you. When we received our gifts, after the courts had distributed the estate we found that the gift that we all got was rather large. We had no idea, he lived very humbly, serving the church very humbly all of the years that I knew him in the same house and yet he had saved a lot of money and we all got a rather large gift and again that guilt was so strong that I didn't deserve it.

Now I had a huge debt. You see, when I started my doctoral work I took out a student loan and then another and then another and I had a huge debt from my doctoral work and when I completed the program the debt started to accrue interest and it was even getting larger. I don't know how I was going to pay it, I didn't had a plan, but I felt a lot of shame about that debt. Nobody knew and I didn't want anyone to know. It was a secret, so it had power over me and this is what sin does. It was power over us and it cripples us because we are scared what if someone find out my secret. The shame that I had this huge debt, well we found out when we all got our inheritance from my uncle that it was rather large as I said and it was large enough to cover my student loans. All I had to do is to write one check and it was done, I was free. I was in shock because I had been so worried for so long and been so guilty and so full of shame for so long and all of a sudden, I was free, no more fear and no more shame.

The debt was completely paid. After that the debt was paid and I was free, I was not worried about it anymore. Fear and shame were gone completely because of grace.

So this is how we look at our grace that we receive as an heir of God. My story was a human story. It was a story with human aspects that don't completely translate to what God has done for us, because God's love for us is so much bigger, but so many things about my story are the same.

Understanding Grace, *by being an HEIR*–

- Received because of my IDENTITY; my place in God's family Undeserved grace
- Salvation cannot be earned
- Secured; can never change
- All I have to do is accept it
- My Debt is paid
- Free from fear and shame!

Mistaken identity:

The way the scripture is presented it makes a reference to how the world sees us, so lets look at that. The end of verse 1 says,

The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

The scripture tells us not everyone will understand this, not everyone will know we are children of God, not everyone will understand grace because the world doesn't know him, and the world doesn't see us this way and we can't expect that. So we should be prepared that the world will not see us this way. Well how does the world see our identity.

When you meet someone at any age, we ask them what do you do? Because that's how the world sees us. In fact, we are so tied into our career identity that that is how we see everyone. In fact, if we meet a small child you might ask them what are going to be when you grow up. Again, we are already tying them into identity.

There is fear and the shame because we all have a past, and we have all done things that we regret, and everyone has done some things that people hope that nobody will find out because it is part of the human condition. This is so complete and thorough in this culture as well as in the United States. Men are identified with their careers first. Women are identified first by their relationships. It is fairly normal and okay to ask this to anyone but that is not really our ultimate identity.

Our past holds us back and it haunts us every day of our life. Our hurts hold us back, our sin holds us back because if we carry it and we don't let it go to be forgiven we carry that shame and it restricts what we can do, we can't be powerful in the kingdom if we are still carrying that debt, we can't be effective in the kingdom and without Christ we have no hope and no peace.

I took comfort from the fact that I am a child of God and I heard God say to me, you are my child, I look at you and I see Christ and his dying work on the cross and his resurrection, I see that. So I look at you and you are perfect when I look at you because of Jesus Christ. You are my child, I said so. That is who you really are, not your circumstances that brought you in this bad place today, not even your teaching certificate or your administrative license, it is not really who I was or who I am, God said you are how I say you are and I say you are my child.

Our ultimate identity is being a child of God.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

We are children of God and we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him. That's the assurance of being a child of God. So I want to ask you a question, where is your identity, are you a child of the king. If we are not sure, we just have to accept the gift, it has been done. The work of Jesus Christ has been done, your debt is paid and its permanent, all you have to do is accept it.