

[Slide 1] The Danger of Being Nothing

Revelation 3:14-22 [Slide 2]

[Slide 3] What if you woke up one morning without a clue as to your identity? What if tomorrow morning you could not figure out if you were a nuclear physicist or a barista at Starbucks? Imagine looking at documents with your picture on them—a drivers license, a passport—but they were totally unhelpful in connecting that picture to the face you see in the mirror.

If that happened to you, then you could relate to Jason Bourne, the hero of the Bourne trilogy movies. He is a man with a big problem in that he does not know who he is. The plot of each movie revolves around him trying to answer the question, “Who am I?”

Dangerous position to be in, wouldn't you say? How can you authentically live your life without knowing who you are?

The seventh church in Christ's letters to the churches of Revelation was in a similar predicament except they didn't realize it. There is conscious ignorance and unconscious ignorance and they were in the latter category.

Christ challenged their neutrality, their state of non-being, when He told them that that was neither hot nor cold (vv.15-16). The question, then, is posed for us: “Who are we? Do we have a clear identity?”

When Christ told them that they were neither hot nor cold, He was giving them a mental image with which they would have been well acquainted. In nearby Hieropolis, there was a well-known spring of hot water coming up from the earth. In contact, Colosse was well known for its bracing cold water spring.

When true to its nature, hot water can be relaxing while cold water is refreshing. The Laodician church could neither comfort nor challenge. Someone once said that the role of the church is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. They could do neither because they were lukewarm. They were nothing.

[Slide 4] An axiom of human behavior: BEING precedes DOING

How do you and I identify ourselves? The answer is a statement of being, of who we are. Sometimes we do it through it though our vocations, through what we do. When asked, “Tell me something about yourself,” a typical reply is “well, I work at XYZ Company.” The problem there is that what if you can't DO anymore. Does that mean to cease to BE? For some, it does.

Sometimes we do it through family relationships. This is a little closer to BEING; it is an identity based on our connections to other human beings, who sometimes choose to disassociate with us. What then? Who are we then?

The human author of this letter had an interesting approach to identity, one that we might consider. How would John have identified himself? He could have done so in a variety of ways. “I was one of the Apostles, one of the Twelve. Not only that I was one of the Three, the inner circle. I was there at the Mount of Transfiguration and saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. I was one of the few who hung with Jesus until the end. I wrote five of the books in the New Testament.”

But he didn't do that, did he? No, he chose a different approach. In his gospel, we find this recurring reference to himself, "The disciple whom Jesus loved." That was John's identity. That was his answer to the question, "Who are you?"

When we identify ourselves, we give virtually the clearest statement of what is important to us. When I tell you who I am, I am telling you upon what I place the highest value. John believed that the greatest thing in the world was being the object of Jesus' love AND his commitment to be HIS disciple.

The really smart thing about that is one half never changes and the other half is completely within your control. The other things—vocation, jobs, relationships—are always at risk. We never have complete control over them. But an identity as the disciple whom Jesus loves can be unfaltering.

I wonder how it would change our lives if this became our identity. I wonder how much more peaceful we would be. I wonder how much less distracted and pulled and scattered we would be. I wonder how much less materialistic we would be. I wonder how much more effective we would be in making a difference.

Indicators of a Lack of Identity

No SELF AWARENESS [Slide 5]

Because you say... "I...need nothing," and you don't know that you are...blind... (v.17)

How Christ Challenges A Neutral Identity

(1) By giving us a CHOICE [Slide 6]

1. He advises them instead of commanding them "I advise..."
2. The difference between power and authority

Power. The ability to force or coerce someone to do your will, even if they would not chose to, because of your position or your might. *Authority.* The skill of getting people to willingly do your will because of your personal influence. Note that power is an ability while authority is a skill. It doesn't take any brains or courage to exercise power. Another way to distinguish the two is that power can be bought and sold, given and taken away. Authority can't. Power is always ultimately destructive to relationships. Granted, we don't live in a perfect world and sometimes power must be exercised. When that happens, we must reflect on why resorting to power was necessary. Maybe our authority had broken down. Maybe we didn't have any to begin with.

(2) By giving us another CHANCE [Slide 7]

1. They are still one of the seven stars (churches)
2. He tells them what He is going to do, not what He has already done "I am going..."

3. He affirms His love for them “as many as I love...” I have strong words that I need to say to some people and I am putting it off. Why? I tell myself it is because I love them but the truth is it is because I love myself.

Boice on why Methuselah was the oldest man on earth, God’s patience. The name means “when he dies, it will be sent” and the reference was to the flood. He died the year the flood came. The man whose death would usher in the end of the world was the oldest man who ever lived.

Responding to the Challenge

“Be committed and repent.”

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| (1) | BE SOMETHING [Slide 8] | “Be committed” |
| (2) | FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE [Slide 9] | “Repent” |

Jesus knew who He was. Look up the number of times that He said, “I am...” This was the secret to His life on earth, His leadership, His peaceful pace.

The Seven Churches Not In The Book of Revelation [Slide 10]

I once worked for a man who wrote a book with this title. He said this came to him not while he was on the isle of Patmos, like John, but in the aisle of a 737 jet. So, obviously it isn’t inspired. But it is helpful to think about the identities of churches.

- (1) [Slide 11] the **university** church (where the key is instruction and the pastor operates as professor)
- (2) [Slide 12] the **arena** church (where the key is experience and the pastor is a performer)
- (3) [Slide 13] the **corporation** church (where the key is control and the pastor is the CEO)
- (4) [Slide 14] the **machine** church (where the key is activity and the pastor operates as the manager)
- (5) [Slide 15] the **family chapel** church (where the key is relationships with the pastor as chaplain)
- (6) [Slide 16] the **legacy** church (where the key is the past and the pastor is curator)
- (7) [Slide 17] the **community center** church (where the church tenor is issues-based and the pastor is the prophet).

Who are we going to be? We are still trying to discover this during this time of transition. None of the above is necessarily wrong. We might be a combination of two or three. We can’t be everything. We can’t make everyone happy. We can be what God has called to be. We can do His work out of what He has called to be. The best definition of success that I know is “find out what God wants you to be and then go do it.” Being. Doing. Sounds right to me.