

Who Am I?

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[0 : 00] Well, thanks so much, Jackson. Buddy, I'm going to miss you a lot. And I think Jackson comes to us genuinely as a wonderful example of what it is, the benefit holistically that we receive when we immerse ourselves in the life of a church family.

It does feel like a lot longer than two years that Jackson first rocked up here. But it also reminds us, doesn't it, of the call that God makes in our lives to be a multinational and a multi-generation church family that welcomes people from all over the world that find their home in our city.

So it's with great sadness, but excitement that we say goodbye to him this morning. So I just wanted to honour him and just the ways that he has served here. But the ways that the Lord has taught me through him are great.

So Genesis 32 is where we're going to be this morning. So turn with me there. Chris Martin, lead singer of Coldplay. You with me? Yeah?

Fascinating interview he did on BBC Radio 2 a couple of years ago. And he was talking about the soul searching that he was doing during the COVID pandemic when he had to isolate and be all by himself.

[1 : 18] Remember those days? COVID's kind of back in the news, isn't it? Remember those periods of being alone, of isolating, being left alone with your thoughts?

It seems so bizarre now, doesn't it, to think about the fact that at one time we were allowed out in this country for one hour a day at its peak. I wonder, what did you learn? Here's what Chris Martin said.

He said, He said, Last year was quite an eye-opener for me, reflecting back on that year. I was like, who am I without Wembley Stadium saying, you're awesome?

So here's a guy that spent so much of his life performing to thousands of adoring fans. Spending his life with people and acclaim and noise.

But as soon as he was alone and always stripped away, he starts asking himself those big questions that we often ask ourselves in life. What is life all about? Who's acclaim and whose affirmation makes my life worthwhile?

[2 : 22] And what do I do and who am I when no one is watching? Subtext, who am I? Now, we think today that that is a postmodern question.

And it is one that everybody's asking just now. We're searching for identity. But let me just say, it's not a postmodern question at all. Actually, it's a question that human beings have been asking ourselves ever since we were created.

And there's a reason for that. And the reason is that we are all identity craving creatures. And here is why whoever you are here today, wherever you're from, whatever you think of the God of the Bible, I want you to tune in to what we're going to be thinking about for the next 25 minutes or so.

Because this is all about identity. What this is today is the answer that the Bible gives the Christian as to who they are and why. And it's unbelievably good.

If I had to go as far as to say I'm pretty convinced that understanding the answer to that question is the key to flourishing and growing in the Christian life and enjoying the great three-in-one God who we worship.

[3 : 39] So here we are in the book of Genesis and we've come to this defining moment in Jacob's life. Now, if you know anything about this man Jacob, it might well be this episode.

And you've probably picked it up from reading it that it's as weird as it is wonderful. So here's maybe an interpretive lens through which to understand the wrestling match which we're about to get involved in.

Verse 28 is the key for us that I think unlocks the true significance of what's going on here. God says to Jacob, Now here's a fun fact for you about this passage.

I love a fun fact. Here's a fun fact for you. This is the first time the word Israel is used in the Bible. This name that's given to identify the corporate people of God.

And here's what I reckon Moses as he pens this is up to. Here's the purpose of this. Because as he travels with this Israelite generation who are the first readers here, he journeys with them in the wilderness.

[5 : 00] He's probably fully aware of the conversations that are going on in the family tents, right? Picture the scene, an intuitive little girl saying to her dad, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, what's our name again?

Dad says, our name's Israel. But being an intuitive little girl, she doesn't stop there, does she? No, she goes for the question that my girls love to ask me at a minute to wind me up because they get me with it every time.

Yeah, but why are we called Israel? Well, her dad would take her straight to this passage. Or might have been a scroll, don't know.

Takes her to this encounter and he says, Sweetheart, this is why we're called Israel. This is what it is to be the people of God. You see, Jacob's on his way to Canaan.

And at this point in the story, if you remember, he's caught in this kind of trauma sandwich. He's left his uncle Laban behind. And he's got Esau, his brother, up ahead.

[6 : 13] And remember, Esau's got, verse 6, look back. He's got 400 men on his side. And Jacob's heard that there's 400 men with Esau.

So he's trapped between Laban on one side, Esau on the other side. And he's got no idea what Jacob and those 400 men, what their intentions are. And so, verse 22, having sent his camels and his children across the stream, just follow with it, what happens to him?

What does he find himself being? He finds himself all alone. Now, we're not told why. But we are told that the Lord meets him.

Now, this is a wonderful truth about the God of the Bible. The initiative is always his.

And this is what sets apart Christianity from all the other world religions. That knowing this God is not about us working ourselves up to him.

[7 : 23] No, we would have no idea who this God is if he hadn't first revealed himself to us. This God, he comes to meet us in our grime and in our mess.

This God stoops to be with us in our ash heaps and in our alone moments when we have no idea where we're looking to for purpose and any kind of foundation to our lives.

This God steps right into the rubble. And this God has come looking for a fight. You didn't think wrestling was in the Bible?

Think again. God wrestled with Jacob. Now, verse 24 says a man. You read a lot of commentaries. They predict maybe that this was a pre-incarnate Jesus.

We don't know. Text doesn't tell us. But it does tell us, verse 30, that Jacob left this encounter, this wrestle, under no illusions and in zero doubt that he'd just been in combat with the divine.

[8 : 35] All right? Oh, if Sky Sports were offering pay-per-view in this one, I'd be all over it. Yeah? 50-99, I'm taking this one. And the thing is that this should be God versus Jacob.

This should be what they call a non-contest. Because it's not even an even match-up, is it?

No one goes toe-to-toe with the omnipotent, omniscient God. The three times holy God who created the world with the power of his word.

No one goes toe-to-toe with Yahweh. Goes sparring with him and hopes to come out on top. And yet what a strange encounter this is. Because at first it looks like an even match.

Do you see that? But I guess this is a bit like when I do a rugby scrum with my six-year-old girl, Grace. She loves to do a rugby scrum. Big dad secret here, I do not tend to go full-on Jonah Lomu on her in the first ten seconds.

[9 : 44] It's an even match. And I think that's kind of what's going on here to understand it. Just a touch. Wrestled. But just a touch from God.

Do you see that word there? Just a touch. And that's what that word means. It means the slightest of touches. It means what we would say today. A brush. Just a brush of Jacob's hip socket.

And he's limping for the rest of his days. Now here's, there's tons of question marks I've got about this passage. Can I give you my two? Here's number one. God says, Jacob, you've prevailed.

And you think to yourself, what? Call a timeout. You look for the var. How has he prevailed in this situation? The guy's hips out.

How has he won? The wonderful truth about Christianity is that to win with this God is to admit defeat.

[10 : 50] The way to victory comes when we submit ourselves to his lordship. Do you see why Jacob is hanging on?

What's he hanging on in the fight for? Do you see the word? He's hanging on for God's blessing. In other words, Lord, do what you said you'd do. Be who you said you'd be.

Do what you said you'd promise. Make us a people. Remember God had said that promise? That through Jacob and his line, he was going to create a people.

And not just physical people, but people who worship and know the Lord. It's going to come through Jacob's line. He's going to take them to a place. What's so special about the place? That God himself is there.

And more than that, what's he going to do? Is those two things come together. God is going to bless the nations of the world through his people. It's a wonderful thing, isn't it? We sit here today in Scotland.

[11 : 46] Not just around the corner from where this happened. Miles away. We're from all over the place to see how this is God's intention, his heart, for the world, for the nations.

And the thing about this, Jacob says, God, give me that promise. Give me that blessing. The thing is, God has always committed himself to this already.

But now Jacob realizes, and before he was kind of hedging his bets, he was kind of half in. He was kind of up and down. Now he's in the place where he says, God, I see that only you can do it.

Only you can do it. And I think, having been in this passage for a while here, that this is where God wanted Jacob all along.

And God says to him, verse 27, he says, what is your name? Now that's the second question mark I've got of this passage. What is your name? Why do you think it's a question mark?

[12 : 53] Because surely God already knows his name. Yeah? Surely that goes with the territory of being the all-knowing God. Surely that goes with his job description.

But here's what I think the Lord is up to here. And get this and you'll get the very heart of Christianity. Now the last time Jacob was asked that exact question was back at chapter 27.

Now who asked it of him then? His dad. Who are you, my boy? Who are you, my son? And Jacob says, I'm Esau.

He lies. And so God is almost here teeing him up again. Let's have a rerun. Let's do it again. He says, Jacob, who are you?

And it's almost as if God is stopping him in his tracks right there. And in the moment, he's inviting him to put his hand up. And come out of the shadows and say, this is who I am, Lord.

[13 : 57] And inviting him to come and own his own sin. And his mistakes. And his hurts. And his pain.

And his failures. And put his hand up and said, I am Jacob. And I'm the guy that cheated. And I'm the guy that swindled.

And I'm the guy who deceived. And I'm the guy who's the coward. And I'm the guy who makes mistakes in his heart all the time. And it's in that place.

It's the truth. The light shines. And the truth is out. And all is exposed. That God invites Jacob to step forward. And say, do you see how you need saving?

Not from your circumstances. You need saving from yourself. You need me to transform your heart. And right there in that place of admission and surrender.

[14 : 58] The Bible would say that life is to be found. A God that knows us to the bottom. And a God that loves us to the sky.

But get this. Instead of God answering. And it's always a dangerous self to put yourself in the shoes of God. But I tend to do it occasionally in the passage. God could have answered and said, too right you are.

But he doesn't. He says, I'm going to give you a new name. Jacob is what you are by nature. But Israel is what I will make you by grace.

Israel. That name means. And you see it. If you've got an asterisk in your Bible there at the bottom. It means you have prevailed. You have overcome. In other words, God is saying by grace, Jacob.

I am on your side. So dear friends, know this today. That we have a God. God. Who is in the business.

[16 : 01] Of giving new names. And he is in the business of creating in people. New affections.

And awakening in people's hearts. New desires. That weren't there before. And of determining for people. New futures. Daddy, daddy, daddy.

Why are we called Israel? We are called Israel. We are called the people of God. Because our lives are by grace and by faith. They're caught up in this one who God says.

You've overcome. And you think about it. Here's the question of Genesis. If you remember back in Genesis 1, Genesis 2.

God creates this perfect world. It becomes very good when Adam and Eve are made. Creature, creator, living in harmony with one another.

[17 : 00] Genesis 3 comes along. They believe the lie of the devil. They believe the lie of Satan. That the good life is to be found. Not by submitting and loving the Lord. But actually trying to do it your own way.

Away from the Lord. And right there is God makes a promise. In Genesis 3.15. That he will send somebody who will crush Satan himself.

And the question of the rest of the Bible story. But it's certainly the Old Testament rather. Is definitely the question of Genesis. Is this the serpent crusher? Is this the one that God promised he would send?

That he would raise up? And you have to say. Yes, God is saying they're coming from Jacob's line. But it's not Jacob.

And yet echoes from Jacob's story are picked up. As we look down the line of Jacob. And we see Jesus. He was saying he's going to be a man.

[18 : 02] Who found himself truly alone. In the garden before his death. Who truly submitted his will to his father.

Not my will but your will be done. And because of that he truly is the one who overcame. He overcame our mess and our sin.

He died on the cross in our place. So when God asks us to come clean. And face up to our faults. And own our mistakes. He does so by saying.

Look at my son on the cross. Paying for those mistakes and that sin. Do you know it occurred to me recently. That it was not nails that held Jesus on the cross.

Remember this was a man who stilled the storm. This was a man who raised the dead. It wasn't the nails that held him there. It was a desire to accomplish his father's will.

[19 : 05] To save his people from their sin. And to give them a future and a hope with him. He's overcome our sin by going to the cross. And he's overcome death itself.

As he rose on the third day. And because of that. God has given him. And I'll start it with this. The name that is above all names.

And so then to be a Christian believer. Is to have your life caught up with. His name. The king of kings. The lord of lords.

And because of that. Our names in one sense are still the same. But in another sense. They are profoundly different.

Because whereas before. By nature. We were spiritual orphans. We were separated from God. With no future other than his eternal judgment. Now. Because of our faith.

[20 : 08] And because of his grace. We're sons and daughters of the living God. Melissa Kruger writing in her wonderful book.

Identity Theft. Which I highly recommend to you. Is devotional reading. If you're looking for something a little bit different. Reclaiming our identity in Christ. She just says really simply.

Your identity is grounded in God's work in you. Not your work for God. And do you know what that means?

It means the living God. Our father. He feels the same way about us. As he does his son. And boy does he. Adore. His.

Son. You know I've got a friend Dano. Who works for Christians in sport. He has this thing called the three. A. A. M.

[21 : 17] And he gets up and he's stumbling around in the pitch black. Looking for the light. Looking for anything. And he thinks to himself. Who is thinking of me in this moment? Who knows where I am in this moment?

and in one sense nobody does except his father knows exactly what's going on in his life knows exactly what he is he thinks to himself I'm groggy I don't even know what day it is but he's not I'm getting older I can't do so many of the things I used to do he's not my body, my life, my times are changing all around me for him they're not he never tires of being a father to his people and his promises to us in Christ will never fail and so do you see how we too are Jacob by nature but we are children of God by grace that's the gospel can I just give us one quick fire truth maybe to take away from this today and chew on here it is see with this God weakness is the new strength you see God's brought Jacob to this place where he realizes that there's nowhere else I can go and there's nowhere else I want to go but to you and that's a really uncomfortable place to be facing up to the fact that we are not in control because our world sells us the illusion that we are right

Vodafone power to you Burger King have it your way what are both of those things saying you're in control okay that's just Princess Street but let me just say it's a truly healthy place for us to be to recognize that we're not because it's here that God teaches Jacob that he is and you'll find this again and again in the gospels as people encounter Jesus you know friends we can have all we can run all the evangelistic courses and we can have all the evangelistic training that we want but at the end of the day it's going to come down to this what are we discovering right now about Jesus that makes our hearts sing because that's what's going to come out of us when people ask that's what's going to come out of me tomorrow when the parents say at the school playground what did you do at the weekend can I give you one for me just now here it is it's the fact that his most tender and compassionate words are reserved for those who realize they have no hope but him those who say

Lord I believe help my unbelief those who say Lord my little girl is dying Jesus' heart is drawn in love to such people who is it that he consistently points to as an example of how life works in his kingdom it's not the sorted religious types or the rich affluent sorts who does he point to he points to little children those who specialize in the fact that they have nothing to offer you other than open hands to receive kind of how it works with kids right did that Alex did that around Cameron toll yesterday gave them two pounds and they just went and spent it right they weren't looking to pay that back those who have open hands to receive as God weans us off the self-reliance that comes so naturally to each of us and he weans us onto loving and trusting and looking to him and when we run there know that we find at his throne we find grace you know as an 18 year old

I couldn't wait to get away from home be independent do it my way because that's when you that's what you do when you grow up right you take on the world the more you go on in life you realize what a fool that actually life is to be found in submitting to this Jesus actually maturity looks like not going at myself but running to him more as he calls me to deny myself and to take up my cross and to follow him and in so doing find wonderful and counter cultural rest by living a life that's lived in radical independence see if I was to give us oh sorry before we get there in that sense do you see how Jacob limping about for the rest of his life is caught up in this idea of dependence something that the Israelites mark do you see that is they don't eat the Sinai of the thigh this is something that's kind of woven into their corporate life

[26 : 42] I take it that every Christian should not just be walking with a limp but embracing a limp because I will use my weaknesses to magnify his strength I will use everything that comes my way in life to know that he is sovereign and in control do you remember Obama's famous phrase that he took with him on the election trail in 2008 yes we can it's almost as if Jesus invites us to say no we can't but yes you can do you know if there's one word that I pray would come to capture our corporate life together as a church together this year do you know what it would be it would be this word dependence dependence we cannot do anything we're wasting our time if the Lord does not build the house the labourers labour in vain we look to him as it's seen in our lives in desperate corporate prayer Lord would you come and have your way would you save people to yourself would you build this house radical in dependence dependence you know just as we close and she's been in my mind all week this week as I've been thinking about this it was

Irene's funeral on Thursday some of you will know Irene she's been part of this church for years some of you won't know her but let me just tell you about her as we close doing her funeral on Thursday three things struck me firstly it was the photos if you were here you remember the photos this little woman five foot nothing I'm assuming always smiling always smiling secondly it was the place you know apart from the later latter years of her life that she lived in a care home just over in the Granger she spent her whole life in a little flat down in Gorgie and number three was the words that people kept using to describe her and it was the word content now those three things sorry to use the double negative here but they are not disconnected smiling same place content and into our world that's always encouraging us to chase the next big thing yeah holiday job house move etc etc her life cuts so wonderfully against the grain and it reminds us doesn't it of how you get there because I'd listened to the stories about her life and I thought that's where I want to be how do you get there

I take it as by grasping this identity that God gives us by grace who are we we are those who've been chosen who have been loved who have been redeemed who have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit and who are heading home why because of this God of grace and this morning I don't know some of you might be here you've never heard this stuff before love to chat it out with you but may today be the day when you put your faith in this Jesus see his open arms feel his beating heart for some of us else today this might be a thing convicted of our self reliance and again let's just pray come and grab me come and grab anyone who you've seen up here let's pray that today would be the day where God weans us off our self reliance and puts us fully on him will we pray and so this is the words of Isaiah 66

God declares this through Isaiah to his generation but this is the one to whom I will look he who is humble and contrite in spirit and who trembles at my word and so heavenly father we ask lord that you would instill in us that spirit that the disciples just personified as they said lord to who else will we go where else will we go you have the words of eternal life father thank you for the upside down topsy-turvy nature of your kingdom that the first are last and the last are first father thank you for this morning thank you for your precious word and I pray lord that your spirit as your word has gone forth would be at work in each of our hearts thank you that the holy spirit is a way better preacher than I ever will be and I pray that he would be at work in our midst this morning bringing comfort bringing encouragement bringing conviction bringing that deep sense of needing to change but father more so just that awareness of your wonderful grace that's found in Jesus alone father we thank you for your commitment to us and your love for us in Jesus and we pray in his wonderful name amen