**Sermon 21/4/24**

**WHAT ARE YOU WORTH?**

**What are you worth? And how do you measure your worth?**

Mark asked a few of us if we we’d like to preach while he was on long service leave, and he asked if we’d like to choose our own topic or scripture or like him to give us one…and then gave some suggestions.

As many of you know I’m the Children and Families Minister, so I was expecting to speak about being a child of God or being child-like in our approach to our faith, or something profound about being part of God’s family.

But in a comedy of errors (I couldn’t find the email with Mark’s suggestions!), I stumbled across a podcast by Timothy Keller. Actually, Josh Palmer stumbled across it first. He then told ME about it, while we were discussing Ross’s sermon from a fortnight ago, which was also based on a passage from the book of Jeremiah.

I hope you guys are keeping up.

When I listened to it, I got really excited and thought yes! This is something worth sharing! And I’d like to encourage you to check the podcast out for yourself. It was called “The Sickness Unto Death”.

**Lets pray- Heavenley father, we come to you today in awe and wonder, satisfy our curiosities as we ask the question today, what are we worth?**

**In Jesus precious name, we pray, amen.**

Jeremiah 9:21-26

[**21**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/jeremiah/9-21.html) Death has climbed in through our windows and has entered our fortresses; it has removed the children from the streets and the young men from the public squares.

[**22**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/jeremiah/9-22.html) Say, “This is what the LORD declares: “ ‘Dead bodies will lie like dung on the open field, like cut grain behind the reaper, with no one to gather them.’ ”

[**23**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/jeremiah/9-23.html) This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches,

[**24**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/jeremiah/9-24.html) but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

[**25**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/jeremiah/9-25.html) “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh—

[**26**](https://www.biblestudytools.com/jeremiah/9-26.html) Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the wilderness in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”

Wow! Death has climbed in through our windows?! Well, this should be fun to talk about.

(Who is Jeremiah?)

Let’s start with Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was a prophet of God sent at the time when Israel had been split into 2 kingdoms, northern and southern.

Both kingdoms faced corruption, sin and repeated warnings from God to change their ways.

Jeremiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah for about 40 years and during the reign of King Josiah.

Judah was in really bad shape, in fact the nation was crumbling and Jeremiah was sent by God to warn them of their impending collapse.

Verse 21 and 22 set the scene, and where the Israelites are headed.

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They are headed for disaster, for collapse of the kingdom. PAUSE.

Now generally speaking, we live in a world, a society and culture, where we get to choose. We have choices and we make our own choices.

Most of us are not born into roles, such as the royal family, or born into traditional cultures where we are told what to believe. For the most part, we’re not told what to think or how to act.

In our culture we get to decide who we want to be, what our goals are, and we get our value and worth by whether or how well we achieve them.

In this scripture, Jeremaih shows us:

1. How we form our identities.
2. How there is something wrong with the way we form them.
3. A glimpse of a healthy identity
4. How to get a healthy identity.
5. How do we form our identities?

Lets look at verse 23 “This is what the Lord says: Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches”.

The word “boast” here is the Hebrew word hallelu which simply means praise. We recognise it from the word hallelujah, which means praise Yahweh.

And here hallelu has been translated to boasting and in the King James version it is translated to glorying. “Let not the wise glory in…”

Here it’s telling us don’t try to *get* praise from your wisdom, or *get* praise from your might or *get* praise from your riches.

But why? Well secretly, we’re all looking for praise, applause, acclaim, accolades, approval.

We want to know in our hearts I’m praiseworthy, important, valuable.

And I’m worthy and we believe it because I *have that,* or I *did that*. PAUSE.

Have you ever been involved in a standing ovation?

Clapping furiously, cheering, whistling …”and the crowd goes wild…”

EVERYONE OF US WANTS THAT

In our innermost being, we need that.

Evey single human being is trying to perform in some way because they are trying to get this innermost need met.

This is how we find our sense of self, our worth, how we form our identities, who we are.

1. Jeremiah then goes on to show us why there’s something wrong with he way we form our identities.

Death has climbed in through our windows and has entered our fortresses; it has removed the children from the streets and the young men from the public squares. This is what the Lord says: “Let not the wise man boast of your wisdom, or the strong boast in your strength or the rich boast in your riches…”

The culture unravelled. The children and young men – the next generations - were dying, there wasn’t going to be enough people left to bury the dead if Judah continued on this path.

Professional classes trampled on the lower classes trying to gain more power, they were invaded by their neighbours and the kingdom was collapsing.

Why did the professional classes need more and more power, more and more praise?

Because of the way we form our identity.

We try to get the praise from places that don’t satisfy the need.

Let me show you something-

Visual- these flowers represent my worth – aren’t they beautiful? A wonderful work of art. A great representation of my worth!

Who do I identify as? What are the things I might do for accolades?

1. Well I Run, I run far, has that made my worth any greater?
2. What if I run fast? Any better?
3. What about a few squats? 1, 2, 3…97,98,99, 100!

Surely now I deserve a standing ovation?! Has my worth increased? Do they make the flowers any better?

No! They have no influence on the flowers at all! No influence on my worth at all!

Can you see they are 2 separate things? PAUSE.

Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard said

“Faith is when the self wants to be itself grounded transparently in God, Sin is trying to become a self without God, and when you do that (he said), your identity is like a king without a country, or one who has subjects who could desert him at any moment.”

If you try and get your sense of self, your sense of worth, your applause, acclaim, accolades from any created thing, your identity will be an unstable, fragile thing. PAUSE.

Some of you may have actually performed and been the object of a standing ovation or something similar, perhaps a performance review where they absolutely love you. If you have, you’ll know 2 things:

1. You really, really want this, deeply. You love this feeling. And,
2. It doesn’t last!

As Tomothy Keler says, “Outer applause never translates to inner applause.”

It doesn’t stick, it doesn’t sink in.

You get applause on Saturday, you’re looking for more by Monday.

THERES SOMETHING WRONG WITH US!!

Look at my running. Mark’s not here no need to talk about golf. Let’s talk about something much more fun, running.

When I started running, probably 12 years ago now, I could not run to the end of my street. Seriously, I could not breath and I felt like I was going to have a heart attack. But over time with consistency, determination and a few good friends cheering me on, I persisted, and eventually I ran my first City to Bay. 12km. The morning of that event I had 2 goals, to run it, not walk, and to finish the race. And I did it! And it felt great! And the praise I got from people I new was amazing, it far exceeded what I was expecting. They thought Iws amazing! Of course, some of them probably didn’t expect me to do it but those accolades, wow. It felt like a standing ovation to me, and I’d never had a standing ovation before.

So what do you think happened next? Did I quit running?

Of course not!

I wanted more! Soon after I ran a 15km event. Then a girlfriend said “you know it’s only 6 more ks to half marathon?” Wow! That would make me really good. I might even call myself a runner then. 3 weeks later I ran my first half marathon. By the way I could barely walk back to the car! Did I stop there? No! The following year ran my first full marathon. Guest what? I run ultra marathons now.

(Now it’s not all about the accolades. I do love running, especially in creation.

In the beginning though…well…)

Tell me a time that it didn’t feel good when someone said well done, you’re amazing. We love it.

In my little running community, we have an unwritten rule that says, when you participate in a running event, you’re not allowed to sign up to another event for a least a week! Why? Because you’re on such a high after the event, you want more! You don’t want it to end!

There’s something wrong with us. The accolades we’re longing for are not found here. These don’t last.

As Timothy Keller says “Every human heart is seeking acclaim for a great performance but the verdict is never in because the performance is never over.” REPEAT.

There is something wrong with how we form our identity.

We yearn to hear that we are praiseworthy, love worthy, but when we get it it doesn’t last.

There is something wrong with how we form our identity.

1. Next Jeremiah gives us a glimpse at a healthy identity.

I was brought up being told that boasting was bad. You shouldn’t boast!

“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches” …this doesn’t work.

But then what does Jeremiah say? Does he say don’t boast?

No! He says, “but let him who boats, boast”! Boast about this! Boast about God!

God can give you that confidence, that boldness, God can give you that applause, absolute certainty.

How? Notice there are no more “yours”.

It’s no longer from *your* anything, it’s not tied in any way to anything you do. Not your wisdom, your strength, your riches.

I can give you that verdict but it’s not tied to your performance at all.

Paul shows us this in the New Testament. Now does Paul lack self-esteem? Does Paul worry about what people think of him? No! He oozes confidence!

And he says, if you know God, God can give it to you.

Paul says in 1 Cor 4 verse 3, I care very little if I am judged by you or any human court, indeed I don’t even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It’s the lord who judges me.

He had incredible confidence, where did he get it?

Usually if we don’t care what other people think, we say we only care about what we think. Is that what Paul is saying? No!

If I think my own opinion is better than everyone else’s, how can that help?

If I get caught up in my own opinions of myself it goes one of 2 ways, I either beat myself up for not being good enough or I become full of myself and dismissive of other people. PAUSE.

There’s a story about Winston Churchill, apologies if I don’t tell it perfectly, but the gist of it goes like this. A man was once rude to Winston Churchill, and when Winston Churchill accused him of being rude to him, the man said, “but sir, you were rude to me first”, and Winston Churchill, was allegedly heard to say as he walked away, “but I am a great man”.

Yes, but I’m a great man.

You were rude, I was rude, but I don’t need to apologise to you because I’m a great man. PAUSE.

When Paul says I don’t care what you think, he says he doesn’t even judge himself. I don’t care about your opinion or my opinion!

It’s only the Lord’s opinion of me that matters.

And that is the truth of it. It’s the applause of God that we need! The approval of God. The acclaim of God. The accolades of God. That is what our hearts really desire.

That’s the only thing that will give us that permanent sense of worth. That is what forms a healthy identity. PAUSE.

1. But how?? How do we get that healthy identity?

Let him who boasts, boast about this, that he understands and knows me (God).

I can give you this confidence if you know me! I will give you the applause, the acclaim, the accolades your heart’s desire.

So, how do we know God? That is different from knowing about God. How do we know Him?

Who is He? The passage tells us he is “the Lord who exercises kindness, righteousness, and justice on all the earth.” That’s who God is.

But who can live up to that? Who can live up to God’s righteousness and justice?

No-one!

But the verse begins with his kindness. The Lord who exercises kindness. The Hebrew word used here for kindness means *unconditional love*, this is the love that God gives. What is unconditional love? Love without conditions? Love that is not related to performance.

He can give us the applause, acclaim, accolades, apart from our performance. Irrespective of our performance. Do you hear that? It has nothing to do with our what we know, what we do or what we have. Nothing to do with our wisdom, our strength or our riches.

He says, I remove the connection between your performance and your identity.

Because I’m going to give you MY praise, MY acclaim, MY accolade…

The divine accolade. That is what we need. PAUSE.

Paul says, at the end of Galatians 6

“God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of Christ.”

Why would that do it?

In Tim Keller’s words “The greatest somebody in history became a nobody.” The one and only perfect person to walk the earth became nobody.

The one, the only one who deserved absolute applause, acclaim, accolades, standing ovation, was mocked, jeered, spat on, tortured.

2 Cor 5:21 God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might be the righteousness of God. Why??

Jesus got the verdict that our performance deserves, so that we could get the verdict he deserves. REPEAT

Remember Abraham? God tested Abraham and told him to sacrifice his only son to him. Abraham did exactly as God asked, and just as he was about to kill his own son, God spoke to him again.

Now I know that you love me because you did not withhold your one and only son from me, whom you love so dearly.

Now look at the cross. What did God do with His son at the cross?

Now I know that you love me, for you did not withhold YOUR only son from me, whom you love so dearly! REPEAT.

The more you boast about him, the more you will see how absolutely he loves you.

We must boast in the cross!

This is how much God loves me!!! He did not withhold his only son from me. Jesus got the verdict that my performance deserves, so that I could get the verdict he deserved.

What does this mean?

If you are sure about what God did for you through the cross you don’t need the praise of other people!! Nor do you need your own praise!

Other peoples opinions will no longer affect sense of self or your identity, they will simply become feedback.

Are you sure that God gave up His only son for you? Are you sure of this? Do you know this?

What do you think Christianity is? Is it just a bunch of rules; a set of rules that are impossible to follow? Or is it a whole other way of being in the world?

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This is talking about a new heart.

This was a warning to Judah that the kingdom was on the path to collapse.

What is the warning to us?

We need to be circumcised in the heart. Paul repeats this at the end of Galatians 6.

We need a new life, the new birth, that comes from being circumcised in the heart.

As Christians we know that the old identity and new identity coexist, but the more we know God, our new identity strengthens and the old fades away.

God forbid that I should boast in anything other than the cross.

Galatians 6:14-15. “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything: what counts is the new creation.”

God is a powerful God but he’s also an incredibly loving God.

He has taken care of everything through Jesus.

And when he looks at us through the cross of Jesus, as new creations, he says wow, you are amazing, well done my good and faithful servant. And that is the only opinion that matters and the only one that satisfies our inner most need for accolades, acclaim, approval, applause. This is where we find our worth and identity.

**Let’s pray-**

Heavenley Father, thank you for bringing this word to us today. Thank you for showing us our worth and identity is not tied up in anything we could possibly do! Not our wisdom our strength or our riches. Our worth is determined by what you think of us. Our identity lies wholly in the death and resurrection of your only son, whom you gave for us. For *that* is what we’re worth to you. May we boast in this forever! In Jesus precious name we pray, amen.