

Last Sunday we kicked off our series on "The Promise of Hope." Our All Pro Dads group is kicking off their new season today with a tail gate party. That's why you see some Dads and their Kids in team jerseys. As we know, hope can be allusive. The Lions, Wolverines and Spartans all had great hopes for the start of their new seasons. All three have already been defeated. Hopes for great seasons have faded. After only a few games fans are getting a better picture of what their teams really are.

What about us? Who am I? Who are you? How do we define ourselves? Where do we find meaning in life? Does our meaning come from our jobs or our families? Do we find meaning in the house we live in, the cars we drive or the vacations we take? Do we get graded on our looks, our clothes or our weight? Do the number of "Likes," "Friends," or "Followers" on social media determine who we are? Are these the kinds of things that determine whether or not we are important people? I hope not.

God tells us that we are important. The book of Genesis, the story of the beginning, tells us, *"Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.'" (Genesis 1:26 NLT)* We are important to God because He created us to be like Him. We are more like God than any other part of creation. Let's make sure we get this right. We are not gods. But the first people were created with the qualities, the characteristics of God. God created people to have a relationship with Him and with one another. God gave people the attributes of love, grace, kindness. He placed eternity in our hearts because He made us to live with Him forever.

So what happened? What went wrong that we don't live in a time when people don't love and honor God or love and respect one another? The answer is given to us in Genesis. God doesn't force Himself on anyone. He gives all people the free will to determine their own actions. God gave the first people a choice. God told Adam, *"You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."* (Genesis 2:16-17 NLT) They could choose to love and obey Him or they could reject Him and disobey His command.

We know what happened. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge. Listen to what happened after that first bite. *"At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves."* (Genesis 3:7 NLT) Everything changed in that moment as guilt, shame and fear entered into their lives. Instead of being friends of God, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God. Instead of being loving partners and helpers, Adam and Eve began to play pass the buck for what they had done. Everyone who has walked on this planet since has followed their example, disobeyed God's command and has tried to find a way to deal with their sin and guilt.

There is only one exception to this truth, Jesus. He is the fulfillment of God's promise to pay for our sins so that we could be restored to a right relationship with God. The Apostle Paul tells us what God has done for us. *"But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children."* (Galatians 4:4-5 NLT)

[God is in the Restoration Business. Think about that as you watch this video. \("Restored"\)](#)

Since we have been restored, who are we now? We have been given a new identity, a new life in Christ. Peter wrote, *"Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."* (1 Peter 2:10 NLT) Without Jesus we can only wish for a place in God's family. Our right relationship with God has been restored by Christ. We are important to God. We are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. God has made us new in Christ. We were created to give praise and glory to God.

What difference does this make? What's changing in our lives? God loves us just the way we are. We can't make God loves us more than He already does. Because He loves us, He wants to change us to make our lives full and complete. He wants to restore the image of God that was lost in our sin. Paul tells us, *"The Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image."* (2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT) God's Spirit is working in us to restore our lost image, to make us more like Jesus. God wants people to see Jesus in us. He wants us to let the light of His love shine through us to the people around us.

When that happens we can take another look at other people. God wants us to respect everyone as created by Him. God wants us to love and help others because Jesus gave His life for them. Paul wrote about the changes in relationships God made in the early Christians. *"There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:28 NLT)

There is new hope for families when we see the other family members as people loved and created by God. There is hope for communities when we see the opportunities God gives us to serve the people around us. There is hope for Christians to build up one another in the church, to work together for the common good and to set aside what "I" want for the good of all because we are one in Christ. There is hope for our nation when Christians live their faith and become a living witness to those around us. There is hope for our nations if we as a people turn back to God in repentance and faith. Hope starts with God that God gives to us and reaches others through us.