

You Are You

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[0 : 00] Well, during our evening services at the moment, we're doing a series called Doctrine for Mission.

Now, don't worry if you haven't been with us for parts of this service. I'm going to begin with a wee bit of a recap so you'll be able to get the gist of what we've been trying to say over the past few weeks. The whole idea of this series, or the whole reason why we're doing this series, is because we are so aware that as Christians, every single one of us has a command and a responsibility to share our faith with others.

That's how the church is built, God working through people like us to share the good news of Jesus. So it's something that every single one of us needs to do and wants to do as Christians, but it's something that every single one of us finds hard.

Sharing our faith is not easy. It's something that I think every single one of us will feel that we're pretty rubbish at. The whole aim of this series is to highlight the fact that there are some key theological truths that can make a massive difference for us as we seek to share our faith.

These truths undergird our evangelism and when we think of them and when we understand them more it can be a great encouragement for us as we seek to share our faith.

[1 : 32] We started off by saying that the most important truth of it all is to remember that God is God. He is the one who is sovereign. He is who he is.

That means that he is able. He is willing to save. And on that basis you can look at any person in any place in any circumstances and know that the Gospel can transform their lives because God can do it and God is God.

No matter who you look at, nothing is impossible because God is God. That God has revealed himself to us and the truth that he reveals is the truth.

Your message is not kind of a fairy tale of optimistic religious hopefulness, it is the truth and we can proclaim that truth confidently.

What's even more amazing though is that the truth that he reveals to us is not a message of rejection, it's a Gospel message and that good news is good news. We're not going out with depressing boring dull news, we're going out with brilliant news.

[2 : 40] At the heart of that good news is God's willingness to graciously give us what we never deserve. We are saved by grace, we never earn it because grace is grace.

And that message transforms our lives now and it gives us hope forevermore. The message that God reveals in Jesus Christ is a message of eternal life and there is nothing more important than that because eternity is eternity.

All of these give us a foundation, a firm foundation for sharing our faith. They're all theological truths that empower us for the work of evangelism.

And when I say all that, I'm pretty certain that many if not all of you are tempted to say none of that's the problem.

The problem is not God, it's not the truth that he reveals, it's not the good news of the Gospel or the grace by which we're saved or the eternity that awaits us. The problem is none of these things.

[3 : 55] The problem is me. God is God and he never changes but if you are anything like me you will look at yourself and you will wish that you were very different.

I look at myself and I see a huge pile of weaknesses, failings, insecurities, all of which seriously undermine my efforts to share my faith. When I look back at all the times I've tried to share my faith as a Christian, I don't look back at a long success story.

I look back at so many times where I thought, oh man, I wish I did that differently or maybe more likely I wish I'd actually tried in the first place.

And if that's how you feel then that's how I feel. But for all of us who feel like that, tonight I'm going to say something that you'll probably find hard to believe but it's something that's incredibly important.

When it comes to sharing your faith we've got to remember that God is God. We've got to remember all of these things but alongside that it is absolutely crucial that you must never ever ever forget that you are you.

[5 : 14] Now that might sound like a strange thing to say and it probably seems a bit obvious but the fact that it's obvious means that it's all too easy to forget.

And it's teaching us a crucial lesson for our evangelism and we see this by going back to the passage that we read in Exodus chapter 3 and chapter 4.

Let me read again verses 10 to 11. Moses said to the Lord, oh my Lord I'm not eloquent either in past or since you've spoken to your servant I'm slow of speech and of tongue. Then the Lord said to him, who's made your mouth?

Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? If you can remember all the way back to the first sermon we were in the same passage when we spoke about when we said God is God we took Exodus chapter 3 as our passage then as well.

And as we read tonight in that passage God appears to Moses in a burning bush and he calls Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. You see that in verses 13 and 14 of chapter 3.

[6 : 27] As God did that he gave this massively important revelation of himself where he says I am who I am as you can see in the verses there in front of you.

And Moses as he sees the burning bush and as he sees the staff turn into a serpent and his hand become leprous and then healed again he's left in no doubt whatsoever that God is God.

But at the same time these chapters reveal that the God who is sovereign and powerful has chosen to work out his purposes through a person who is very ordinary.

Right after God says to Moses I am who I am he then says to him say this to the people of Israel I am has sent me to you.

Moses is chosen by God to deliver his people out of Egypt. Now because Moses is such a famous figure in the history of Christianity and of the Bible you know we tend to think of him as a big you know important capable figure but we've got to get right back to this point to remember that at this point in time Moses was an eight year old shepherd in the middle of nowhere.

[7 : 47] A complete nobody and there was nothing particularly talented about him so you know we think oh well God's choosing Moses because he's so big and confident and capable.

No not at all. In fact it's the opposite. If you read through these chapters again what we discovered is that that Moses is not strong and capable what we discovered is that he is weak and that he's insecure and struggling yet God came to this weak nervous old shepherd in the middle of nowhere and he makes it very clear that he's going to use him for his purposes.

God is the great I am but he works out his purposes through a very ordinary me.

God takes Moses as he was and he uses him to do amazing things and this is where we see that alongside the foundational truth that God is God lies the fact that you are you.

Now why is this so important to remember for evangelism? Well the reason it's so important is because when it comes to sharing our faith we can very often feel like evangelism is the work is a work that's meant to be done by a very select group of gifted experts and we are definitely not one of them and so we look at ourselves and we see somebody who doesn't know enough someone who can't speak clearly enough someone who's evangelistic zeal is drowned by a flood of fear and insecurity and at the same time we look at people who are good at evangelism they seem so confident so capable so brave they can talk to anyone they've gone to all sorts of places they've seen and done all sorts of wonderful things and then we look back at ourselves and we come to one of two conclusions either we think I'm not like that therefore God cannot use me and we end up feeling very discouraged and pretty useless or we can think I'm not like that so I need to become like that if God is going to use me and the resulting conclusion is that we think that if God is going to use us we need to undergo a fairly urgent personality transplant and to achieve that we need to change and copy other people and be more like them let's be like the ones who are far better at sharing their faith than us or we just give up.

[10 : 25] Now it is the case it's absolutely the case that we can learn from other people when it comes to sharing our faith the New Testament encourages us to imitate those from whom we've heard the gospel so we're not saying that when it comes to evangelism you can't and shouldn't

learn from others you absolutely can but if you look at yourself in the mirror and if you think to yourself that the biggest problem with your witnessing is you and if you think that witnessing is a job for other people and if you think that you need to undergo a radical personality overhaul in order to be used by God if you think all of those things then you are wrong you are theologically wrong because none of these conclusions are correct when it comes to sharing our faith we must never forget that God is God but you must also never forget that you are you.

Why is that? Why do you need to remember that? Well first and foremost the fact that you are you is simply a basic out working of the core theological truths the Bible gives us regarding the creation and providence of God.

Think about these questions who formed you in your mother's womb? The biblical answer to that question is God. Who gave you the abilities and skills that you have?

Again the Bible says God. Whose image are you made in? God's. Who wrote the days of your life? God. Who's ultimately responsible for your height, your hair, your hair colour, the sound of your voice, the pattern of your fingerprint?

That's God again and over it all who is your creator? You don't need me to tell you the answer and you see this so clearly in Exodus 4 right after Moses laments the fact that he's terrible at speaking in verse 10 of chapter 4 God then says to him who made your mouth?

[12 : 36] God did. So our theology is telling us that the people we are is a result of the plan and work of God.

Now obviously that does not include our sin. Our sin is a distortion of what God intended us to be. It's a rebellion against our creator.

It spoils our God created humanity. But in terms of our personality, in terms of your characteristics, your circumstances, we don't put these down simply to biological or sociological factors.

We rightly regard these as the work of God. So if you go back to Exodus 4 and ask the question who made Moses? Moses. Who made him the meek, timid, not very keen on public speaking Moses?

The answer to that question is that it was God. So who has made you, you?

[13 : 39] The answer is the same. It's God. Your His workmanship and that of course is why you're unique. That's why you're special.

That's why there's no one else who's the same as you. There are things about you that are the deliberate plan of God and that is why you are not some piece of useless evangelistic hopelessness.

You are you. You're the person whom God has made. And that means that just as God came to Moses and was able to use him as he was and where he was for his glory, God can do exactly the same with you.

And there's three specific things I want us to highlight in that regard. First of all, you are where you are.

When we talk about God's providence, we are referring to the fact that God is in control of every detail of the universe and every detail of our lives. He upholds, directs and governs all of his creation.

[14 : 53] So that means that your weekly routine is part of what God has worked out in his wise and sovereign providence. So let's apply that to evangelism.

You are where you are. So where are you going to be tomorrow? At home? At work? At school? In the community? At a friend's house?

What are you going to be doing? Going to people, working with people, attending to responsibilities, looking at social media, interacting with people online?

Now ask yourself the question, is any aspect of what you are going to be doing tomorrow outside the providence of God?

No, absolutely none of it is. So who has placed you where you are?

[15 : 48] God has. And why do you think he's done that? It's because he's got work for you to do right there.

So in terms of us sharing our faith, we need to ask ourselves the question, are you likely to have contact with an unbeliever tomorrow? Either in your home or your work or in the community or even at the supermarket, are you going to interact with an unbeliever tomorrow?

If you are, which I think all of us are, then why do you think God is doing that? Why is the great work of ordering and sustaining the universe leading towards a convergence of you and an unbeliever tomorrow?

Why is God doing that? He's doing it because he can use people just like you. And that's exactly why he opens up these opportunities for us all the time.

Now that doesn't mean that you're going to be able to have a wonderfully fruitful gospel conversation at the Tesco checkout tomorrow. That kind of thing doesn't happen very often. What it means is that where you are right now is a massive opportunity for you to be a light in this world.

[17:07] Your prayers for the people you know might be the only time anybody mentions that person to God. Your speech, your conduct, your interest in other people, your acts of kindness, your self-control, all of these can be an immensely powerful witness to the people that you meet.

Never forget that witnessing isn't really something that we turn on and off. It's something that we do all the time. We just either do it well or we do it badly.

But we're constantly doing it. And alongside that constant witness of our behaviour, God can open up opportunities for you to tell somebody about the amazing difference that Jesus has made in your life.

That can happen in the car, it can happen on a walk, it can happen at a desk, it can happen at a cafe, it can happen through a conversation on your phone, it can happen anywhere you are, where you are.

And if God is God, then can He use you there? Of course He can. In fact, that's exactly why He's put you there.

[18:17] You are where you are. The second thing though is that you are who you are. This is really important because every single one of us is different.

Every single Christian is different. We've got different personalities, different strengths, different weaknesses, different areas of confidence, different areas of fear.

But the great thing about God is that He uses all sorts of different people to spread the good news about Jesus. You see that right through the Bible. So here we've got Moses who's quiet and not very good at speaking.

Later on you come to Elijah. He's bold but also sometimes very depressed. Come to the New Testament, you've got the over-enthusiastic Peter. You've got the grafting Martha.

You've got the contemplating Mary. You've got the fearless Stephen, the persuasive Paul, the nervous Timothy. God uses them all.

[19:16] And throughout history it's been exactly the same. Martin Luther was pretty blunt, maybe even to the point of being almost rude at times.

John Calvin was so studious, loved nothing more than just to be studying away in his books. Philip Melancthon, who is another very important reformer, he was completely conflict averse, which is why I like him because I'm very conflict averse.

You've got Robert Murray McShane used by God in a wonderful revival in the 1840s who was so devoted to God but spent most of his time sick and died aged 29, I think it was.

And then you have Gladys Aylward who was an amazing missionary in the Far East. She was rejected to begin with because she wasn't clever enough.

God has used thousands of very different people through whom he has done amazing work.

[20:18] And central to this is the wonderful teaching that the Bible gives us regarding the gifts of the Spirit. And I won't read it, but you can see it there.

The emphasis of these passages is the fact that all Christians have certain gifts from the Holy Spirit. Some have some, some have others. No one has them all.

No one has none. Some have a gift of evangelism. And that's why from time to time we do meet people who are very natural and capable evangelists.

We do meet people through whom God uses to bring many, many people to faith in Jesus. But at no point does the New Testament say that it's only those who with the gift of evangelism who should spread the gospel.

The command to make disciples is given to all disciples. And that means that you, you with the gifts that you have, you can be used by God as well.

[21:20] But how do you know where your gifts lie? Well, there's a lot that we can say about discerning our gifts as Christians.

But sometimes when it comes to, you know, big questions like that, sometimes the most helpful thing to do is to actually do the most obvious thing of all.

Step one for discovering your gifts in order to serve as a Christian in order to witness. Step one to discern your gifts is to ask yourself, what do you actually like doing?

What do you actually like doing? And I think that's a crucial question because the things that you really like doing are very likely to be the areas where you have a gift through which God can use you to share the gospel.

And that can be a whole host of things. So if you like meeting people, then go for it. Make friends, go for coffees, have people around for dinner, build up relationships so people can see that Jesus has made a massive difference in your life.

[22 : 28] If you like organizing things, then do it. Get stuck in to help with the church or with the community events that are going on. If you like helping people, go for it.

Either through visiting them or sending them a card or a text or by offering to give people a hand with something. If you like being generous and you're able to do so, then keep being generous and look for new opportunities, big or small to do it.

If you like sport, get involved in sport in the community. Same with art, drama, literature, music, whatever your interest may be.

If you like teaching, pray for opportunities to teach others either one to one or in a small group. The key point is that very often what we like doing is a great avenue for serving God and sharing our faith.

This raises another very important point about evangelism. I'm going to say something that's probably going to contradict something that you maybe heard many other people say over the years. I think I've said this before, so you may have heard me say this in the past.

[23 : 48] Very often when it comes to evangelising or when it comes to serving in the church, we are frequently told that we need to get out of our comfort zone.

So when it comes to evangelising, when it comes to serving in church, very often people say you need to get out of your comfort zone. I'm sure you may have heard that I won't ask you to raise your hands, but inwardly you can raise your hand if you've heard that phrase.

It is a helpful phrase, especially if it's reminding us that laziness is not appropriate in the life of a Christian.

I'm a wee bit unshocked about that phrase because I think that there's a danger that the call, get out of your comfort zone. I think there's a danger that it implies that if you're going to be used by God, then you need to do something that you're utterly terrified of.

But it doesn't have to be like that. In fact, the gifts that God has given you means that there will be areas of your life where you feel more confident, more capable, in fact more comfortable.

[25 : 02] And these are the areas where God can do amazing things through you. So if you're lazy, then yes, you definitely have to get out of your comfort zone. But if you are longing to share your faith, but you're crippled by nerves, then don't feel that you have to get out of your comfort zone.

You need to maximise your comfort zone. In other words, you need to think about the things that you love doing, the areas where you feel most confident and comfortable, and then maximise what you can do through that to the glory of God.

Now, obviously, that doesn't mean something sinful. I shouldn't have to say that. It goes without saying. But please think about what you love doing and then think and pray and plan about how that might be an opportunity for you to reach out to people who need to hear the Gospel.

Sometimes our frustration and disappointment about what we lack can cause us to miss the amazing opportunities that are presented by the things that we like.

We need to maximise our comfort zone for the glory of God. So you're where you are, you are who you are.

[26 : 16] There's one more thing I want to highlight. One of the amazing things about the Bible is that it's so realistic. Never pretends that Christians are super women or super men, nor does it suggest that Christian life is a bed of roses.

The Bible recognises that life is tough and it speaks very candidly about how fragile people like us are. But that raises an important question when it comes to sharing our faith, because sometimes when it comes to sharing our faith, you can think to yourself, well, you know, you have to show that everything's wonderful, don't you?

Surely we want to give the impression that following Jesus has made everything brilliant in our lives, and if we are struggling, surely we want to hide that and put on a good outward face. Well, I'm not sure that's true, because when it comes to sharing your faith, you are where you are, you are who you are, but you are also how you are.

And how you are might be different at different times. So yes, there are times as Christians when we feel amazing, and sometimes these are the times when we feel most like sharing our faith.

And that outpouring of enthusiasm can be very, very helpful, but it can also run the risk of being a little bit annoying to people. Often however, we don't feel amazing as Christians.

[27 : 32] We get tired, we face disappointments, we worry about things, we get hurt and bruised by life. Can we evangelise when we feel like that?

Is evangelism like football, where if you're injured, you stay on the sidelines until you're fully fit again? No, I don't think it is.

Sharing our faith is something that we can do no matter how we are feeling. In fact, honesty about how we're feeling can actually be a hugely powerful element of our evangelism.

Someone saying to me, you know, my life is great because I'm a Christian, that can actually be more off-putting than it is appealing. And if it's not true, then it's just an example of hypocrisy. But someone saying, I've had a hard week, but do you know that my faith in Jesus gives me strength and hope that makes a real difference even when everything else is pretty rubbish?

That can show somebody who's got the same struggles as you have that can show them that what you have might just be what they need more than anything else.

[28 : 39] When you share your faith, you are how you are. In other words, our evangelism and every part of our Christian lives has got to display integrity.

Our best evangelism is not when we're putting on a show, trying to impress or conforming to a type. Our best evangelism is when by the grace and power of Jesus Christ working in us, we are being ourselves.

That's why it's so important to remember that you are you. So easy to think that you've got to put on this great show or become like somebody else.

You don't. You just need to be you, the person that God has made you. But the fact that you are you also means that there's certain things that you are not.

And this is where being part of a church is such a blessing. As we try to reach out to others, if you come up against something that you're not good at, you don't have to become good at it because you've got an army of fellow workers who can help you.

[29 : 58] So if someone asks a question that you can't answer, then you can say, well, I've got a friend at church who I think will be able to help us. If you can't cope with finances or administration, there is people at church who can.

If you want to invite someone for dinner, but you're hopeless at cooking, then take them to someone else's house who's really good at entertaining. The key point is that you've got gifts that you can use for the glory of God and your brothers and sisters in the church have got gifts that they can use as well.

And if you're lacking something, they'll have it. And together we can serve side by side. And you see that brilliantly in the life of Moses.

As we read, he kind of has this kind of repeated protest with God about the fact that he's not good at speaking. And in the end, he says, Lord, please send somebody else.

And you can almost hear God sighing when he replies with marvelous simplicity. He says, well, no problem. Aaron's good at speaking. I'll send him with you.

[31 : 00] The crucial thing to remember is that you, where you are and who you are and how you are with the personality and gifts that you have, you can be used by God.

Now, I am not saying that to give you some sort of optimistic niceness that's to make you feel better. I am not saying that I'm not saying this as a guru.

I am saying this as a theologian. This is absolutely rock solid theological fact that God can use you as you are.

And if we recognize that, it makes every day so exciting for all of us. We can get up every morning and pray that this day is going to be a day when we will be used by God.

Now, you might not even be aware that that happens. That doesn't matter. But we can pray that we'll be used by God. So we can pray that we will be led to the person who needs encouragement.

[32 : 05] We can pray that we'll be able to welcome the person who is lonely into our homes. We can pray that our administration and organization would honor God in a clear and obvious way.

We can pray that our words would point people towards Jesus. We can pray that our conduct would show everyone who sees us that we've got something amazing in our lives.

You are you. And that means that you have a unique set of circumstances and gifts for sharing the gospel.

And the fact that God is God means that he's more than capable of using all of these things for his goal. Now, this is more important than ever for the work of the church.

Because once upon a time, ministers like me could come to preach on a Sunday and the whole village would come and hear what I had to say.

[33 : 03] Those days are gone. They're gone. And the only way the people in this community or in the workplaces of Lewis or whatever you live, the only way they're going to be reached is through you, because I can't reach them.

It's through you that they'll be reached. It's through you that they'll come. And then maybe the days will come again when the church is full. And that will be brilliant. But we've got to all play our part in that.

But that's the amazing thing about God is that he said, I can do it through you. I've made you you. I've given you contacts and circumstances and gifts.

And I am more than willing and ready to do it, to work through people like you.

So ask yourself the question. Who is the evangelist sitting in here ready to go out with the gospel this week? And if you are saying her, him or them, you're wrong.

[34 : 09] You've got to say me, because that's what God is making us all. So is tomorrow an exciting day for the gospel for us?

Too right it is. And for anyone who's not yet a Christian or not sure about where they stand before the Lord.

This is just showing you, you know, just how brilliant God's plans are. Because God doesn't just want to make you a believer that follows him.

God wants to make you a missionary through which many other people will come to know him as well.

Every amazing missionary was once an unbeliever. Just think of what God might have in store for you from this day forward to the rest of your life.

[35 : 15] So when it comes to evangelism, we've absolutely got to remember that God is God. But at the same time, never ever forget that you are you.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we just thank you so much that you are our creator, our God.

You're the one who's made us. And we thank you that you've made each of us differently, each of us with gifts and circumstances and contacts that can be used by you for the gospel.

We pray that this week you would use every single one of us in our unique situations to help spread the good news of your son, Jesus Christ.

And we know that you can do it because you are God and may these truths empower us all as we seek to share our faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

[36 : 24] Our concluding Psalm is from Psalm 139, the Sing Sam's version, which in so many ways is just a summary of everything that we've been trying to say. Psalm 139, we'll only sing the first 10 verses, but the whole Psalm speaks of the fact that God knows us, God made us, and we are fulfilling His purposes.

So let's stand and sing verses 1 to 10 together.