

Identity Precedes Mission

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Date: 12 July 2026

Preacher: Joe Tang

[0:00] Anybody know the Argentina score, actually? Has it been finalized yet? No? It's still 1-1?! Okay, I don't mind if you guys are watching the phones.

! If you just give me fingers up, the penalties, that'd be good. Actually, someone pause me if there's the penalties, actually. But more importantly, this morning, was anybody up at 5 a.m. by any chance? Who was up? Wow!

Give a hand to these people for turning up at 11 o'clock to church after a 5 a.m. Wake Up! Very important meeting. Because of the score this morning, for those who don't know, England got through to the semifinals.

We're going to change the sermon, actually. We're going to talk about the theology of homecoming. Because it's very much in the Bible about God losing His children and wanting us to come home. And it's happening. It's happening.

It's been 60 years, 1966, since England last won the World Cup. So we're just going to spend the next hour or so interceding for the England football team. We're going to pray against that weight that they carry of 60 years of not almost getting it.

[1:04] But only kidding. We're only going to spend about 15 minutes. But no, truthfully, we're going to talk about something close to my heart. Even this morning, as I was celebrating as a Brit, I'm also reminded that I'm Chinese.

Trev, the Rev here, would be very, always very clear to tell me, actually, my motherland is not England. Despite being born there, despite growing up there, my first 20 years, my motherland is here.

Is that right? It's Hong Kong. It's China. And here, that's the thing with identity. We have so many different identities. Today, we're going to look at Genesis 17. We're going to look at the topic of identity. We're going to look at how identity relates to mission.

Let's go. Let's go. Thank you, Francis. I needed that. And I don't know about you. Identity is a question we ask these days, Gen Alphas, Gen Zs, Millennials, all of us. Who am I? What's my purpose here?

We have social media. We have tools, even, to build and invent our own identities. Before Facebook, before Instagram, I remember there was a time during MySpace, I was writing out my bio for MySpace.

[2:11] Anybody remember MySpace? Like two shows. And I remember just writing, editing, writing, editing, ultimately just deleting my bio just because it was just so stressful of like, how do I introduce myself in one paragraph?

And all that was just because I had a friend called Tom that I didn't really care what he thought. For those who know, MySpace comes with a friend called Tom for all the accounts. And I remember that moment.

It's exhausting trying to invent your identity. Even now at LinkedIn, it's really awkward sometimes to write about yourself in third person. You know, Alex is a professional. So it's a very strange thing. But we constantly invent and write and create and maintain our identity. It's tiring. It's like building sandcastles in the sand and we're just waiting and hoping that the next wave doesn't sweep it away and people don't find out.

The Bible, the scripture today, offers us a whole new paradigm of how we see identity. It's not something you invent. It's not something you create. It's something you receive.

[3:15] It's something you receive. And so I'm going to invite my dear friend Chris Wong up to read today's passage, which is Genesis 17. This is the Word of God. Everything that I'm going to say, there's going to be a lot of errors maybe, a lot of limitations of who I am.

But this is the Word of God, the Word of God that we have reverence for, the Word of God that we come to listen to. This is the sermon itself. So as Chris reads, may we all stand in reverence of the Word as we listen to Genesis 17, 1 to 15, 16.

Let's go. Genesis 17. When Abraham was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him, I am God Almighty.

Walk before me and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you and may multiply you greatly. Then Abraham fell on his face and God said to him, Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham. For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come to you.

[4:27] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

and I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.

And God said to Abraham, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant made between me and you.

He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised.

[5:38] So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant.

And God said to Abraham, As for Sarai, your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her and moreover I will give you a son by her.

I will bless her and she shall become nations. Kings of peoples shall come from her. Thank you.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Chris. Please be seated.

Go Argentina. Genesis 2, 17, 16. Last week, Pastor Gabe talked about Genesis 16. He talked about anyone remember the topic?

DIY? What happened? Nat knows. Do it yourself? Yes. He did it himself. Yes, he went ahead and had their own boy, Ishmael.

[6:41] So God had promised Abraham at 75 that he's going to be a father. He's going to have descendants more than the stars in the sky. He waited 12, 13 years. Nothing happened. Him and Sarah decided, not quite Hagar, unfortunately, they decided to go their own way, to make it happen themselves.

And they did have a son. They did have a boy called Ishmael. This is chapter 16. So today, we're looking at chapter 17. We're just one week apart from reading chapter 16 and 17.

But in Abraham's life, it was 13 years of silence. 13 years. I don't know if anybody's here waited for something for 13 years. But you can just imagine waking up 13 years.

Every single day, you look Ishmael in the face and you're like, you are the reason that God's not speaking to me anymore. You are the reason that I went and did it my own way. I went a step ahead of God and probably God's angry at me.

God's ignored me. And in fact, I don't even know if the covenant's still on the table anymore, if I'm still going to be a father to the nations. God didn't tell me explicitly to do this, but I did it my own way.

[7:41] And you've got to imagine, this is a 99-year-old Abraham now we're talking about. He's getting old. He's getting frail. He's getting hopeless. But just as we are at the brink, that's when God enters again.

That's when Abraham has an encounter with God. And we see in verse 1, oh Chris, could you leave the Bible out here? Sorry. Thank you.

God Almighty introduces himself. He says, when Abraham was 99 years old, he said, I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be blameless. Walk before me and be blameless. There's no apology. He's saying, hey, sorry about the 13 years of silence. There's no, hey, I saw what you did there 13 years ago with Ishmael, with Hagar. That was not cool. But no, God enters the room just as he's feeling the most insufficient and he introduces himself as God Almighty. In Hebrew, it means El Shaddai. El Shaddai is the all-sufficient one, the one that doesn't need anyone or anything. El Shaddai also means the nourishing one. It's like the parent who's coming into a baby that's crying and weak and picking it up to calm.

[8:45] God introduces himself with the name El Shaddai, God Almighty, and he says next, walk before me. Walk before me. This is an old phrase that people would know. It's like God and it echoes the Garden of Eden as Adam walked with God.

There's a Latin phrase called Coram Deo. In Latin, it literally means before the face of God. And he's actually telling Abraham, live before the face of me. Live before the face of God.

There's moments and chances in my life where I've got to meet some pastors that I really, really, really respect. And there are times when they're talking and they're in these little lectures and someone at the end says, hey, how can we pray for you?

And I'm always curious. Okay, what would people like Tim Keller or Francis Chan, what would they say? What would their prayer request be? You know, they're so close with God. They're so, you know, they're really walking with God. They're living this Coram Deo.

Nearly every single time they say a prayer request along the lines of, help me to live in this way. Coram Deo, to live in the face of God. Let me be so mindful of his presence around me every single day, every single moment that I'll be living under the authority of God for the glory of God.

[9:55] Such a noble prayer request and it's something that we all crave, that we all desire. And this is the first thing that God says to Abraham. After that 13 years of silence, after what it felt like just a disaster, a mistake that Abraham made, God just simply says, live before my face.

Here in Hong Kong, in Asia, we have a tendency of living for a different type of face. There's a saving face. I'm always very scared of mou min, especially to your family, especially to your community or your clan.

In other ways we, I don't know, I do sometimes, we turn up to so many events just to be min, just to show face. We have to do all these little things to show face, to save face. It's all this horizontal, living that can be so exhausting, so tiring.

But God says to Abraham is very simply, live before my face. It's this vertical relationship that you need to care about. And what does Abraham do? The first thing he does in verse 3, I think it says, Abraham fell on his face.

That's the only prerequisite that God has before he gives us an identity, is for us to fall on his face and to live for his face. That's the only prerequisite.

[11:04] The moment we get to that point, God is able to give us this new identity, give us a new name. And we're going to skip to verse 5, we're going to see this renaming bit happening.

Identity, number one, identity is received. Second of all, we're going to read, God gives him a new name in verse 5, God renames Abraham before he has any kids with Sarah.

Again, you've got to understand the timing of that. It's like speaking to someone who's been unemployed for 75 years. He suddenly gets a little job at McDonald's, he does it himself, he finds his way, and then God's like, no, you're going to be a CEO not of one nation, not of one multinational, of multi, multinationals.

You just imagine how crazy and ridiculous that sounds. But the name is important and God knows that our names are often tied with our identity. Now I'm curious, do people here know the meanings behind your own names?

Are there any other Josephs here? I think they're your friend, Josephs. Aaron, I guess a biblical name. Alexander.

[12:19] King, do you know the meaning of your name by any chance? It's too deep. Oh, there we go. This is my neighbor, King, by the way. I love King.

Hey, we live on King's court, so I just can't, we live in his house, we live in his court. Queenie, I'm guessing, King, Queenie, your name is linked to Queen. Yes, Yan Pui.

Oh, Yan Pui, it's full of grace, oh, I love that. Actually, a lot of us, I'm looking out here, has a lot of biblical names, Sam, Aaron, Peter, Josh, Nathan, but Chinese names are interesting, because, I

mean, grace, my brother and I, we're named Hei Man Tang, same as Emily Yan, is also Hei Man Tang, my brother is Yat Man Tang, my Chinese is not so good, but from what I remember, Hei Man is handsome, Yat Man is the opposite of handsome, and so, that's all, but yeah, our parents name us, even our Chinese name, with deep meaning, in this case, in this case, Abraham means exalted father, again, the irony of having this name from his parents, called Abraham, for 75 years, he was childless, he would go to, well, maybe not nursery pickups, he would go to the playgrounds with his friends, and they all have kids, and he's, oh, here's father Abraham, the one without any kids, who just hangs out with us, because he has all the time in the world, how weird is that, for 75 years, he was called exalted father, but he didn't even have a kid, the irony, Queenie's full of grace, I think of Grace Wong, upstairs, our friend, I mean, she's a little bit clumsy, but imagine just the irony of that, maybe even more so, right here, Alex, I hate to put him on the spot, but I am, Alexander Lee, this is one of our leaders, our incredible leaders, but many of you don't know his middle name, his middle name is Win, the irony that his mum would name him, Win, something that he really does, on a basketball court, or the pickleball court, the irony of growing up, to remind yourself, the very thing you don't get, you don't have, that's Alex right here, and that's Abraham as well, every day he has to introduce himself, as I am a father Abraham, the one without the kid, you're reminded of your limitations, you're reminded of what you don't have, you're reminded of what, the disappointment that you have, culturally, of not being, and living up to your name, but not only that, God actually then, names him Abraham, doesn't just mean ham, in terms of the spam, but Abraham means, it's, Pastor Gabe would know better, my Hebrew is not very good, I haven't finished seminary yet, but ha, the sound ha, means Yahweh, the breath of God, Abraham, you know, Nathan, Nathan sounds, Trevham, Kellyham, Gabrielham, like adding this ha sound, literally adding, the very breath of God, into your name, how cool is that, when Alex and I had Eden, we named her Eden Jane Tang, so we wrote it all out, Eden Jane Tang, and for the Jane, we decided to add a Y, in the middle, so it's not just J-A-N-E, it's J-A-Y-N-E, in the same mindset, we wanted Yahweh, God's breath, to be in the middle of her name, so that she'll always remember, that not only God is in the middle of her name, but she's in the middle, God is in the middle of her life, and of her future, last week, as Alex was on, a mission trip, in Myanmar, she was gone for the week, I had my mission trip, to keep the two girls alive, at home, and there was one day, it was Eden, had her parents teachers day, and I said, if you do well, I'll take you somewhere amazing, like way, 10 times better, than Disney, and Ocean Park combined, and the teacher was great, everything was positive,

[15:56] I mean she's three, there's not much feedback, but they did speak, for like 40 minutes, which is crazy, I was like, I'm good, I'm good, I'm happy, and she's like, so let me go, and I took Eden, somewhere really cool, I told her, I told her, better than Disneyland, better than Ocean Park, I took her to Shenzhen, and we had the best time, we stayed overnight, we had a hotel, and she was so excited, I'm going on holiday, I'm going to bring my little suitcase, we jumped on the bed, and we'd go shopping, and she'd try on these dresses, I'm like, Alex, Eden, you look incredible, in this dress, I love this dress, I love your hair, I love your backpack, that you packed for yourself, and nearly every single compliment, that I gave her, she would tell me a fact, an opinion, of one of her friends, and she's got a friend, named Dada, short for Matilda, we love her, she's a dear friend, but Dada's opinion, mean a lot to her, every time I said, oh your hair's great, she's like, oh no, but Dada says, it's not long enough, and I love this dress, but Dada says, it's not pink enough, I love that cup, that you use at school, and she's like, oh can I get a new one, because Dada says, it doesn't have, the right princesses, more Elsa, and, about the 50th time in, of that weekend, and I hear Dada's opinion,

I'm like, okay that's it, Dada doesn't know, anything, okay, she doesn't know, Jack or Jill, or Luke or Bill, she doesn't know anything, what I say matters, my, your mom, and myself, we think your hair is great, your hair is great, your dress is perfect, just listen to our voice, don't listen to Dada, and it's funny, but we all have Dada's in our life, friends even, family even, constantly nitpick, constantly say what you don't have, constantly say, oh, you just missed that two points, your hair looks a little bit different, it's not as good as what it used to be, and it's tiring, and we don't even know it, and it could actually bring us down, it could actually take away the identity, that we've been called to live, so my prayer for Eden, is that she always, always knows, that her earthly, and heavenly father, we've named her Eden, because she's God's delight, she's God's original plan, no matter what, the Dada's, many other Dada's in the future, will tell her, our name is important, and why does God

change Abraham's name, because he knows, it's linked to identity, and when you change someone's identity, you change the trajectory, of the mission, of the life, the destiny, and of the future, and we see that in verse six,

I will make you, exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you, in the kingdom of God, we know this, who you are determines what you do, who you are determines what you do, so number one, the first point was, identity is something you receive, number two, identity precedes mission, identity precedes mission, if we get it backwards, goodness me, you're going to burn out, we're going to have, imposter syndrome, we're going to have legalism, we're going to have all these rules, and things, and it's just going to burn us out, I've been there, and I remember what it is, to live from place to place, building your works, your mission, just to have this identity, for the most part of my 20s, I lived in countries like Bolivia, and Chile, and Zambia, and I loved it, I loved every single moment, living there, every weekend, driving my 4x4, to see the elephant orphanage, to the cheetah sanctuary, and just literally hang out, with animals all week, all weekend, but when God called me to Hong Kong, very reluctantly, the first two or three years, of those who know me back then,

I really didn't want to be here, I really didn't want to be here, and at first, I thought it's just Hong Kong, it's humid, it's fast paced, there's no space, but after a while, I recognized it, it might be deeper, and a mentor of mine, told me this, that if you don't learn, to love yourself, you won't love where you are, and I realized that actually, those years of my 20s, is my adulthood, living in these countries, I loved my work, I loved living there, but I loved the identity, that it gave me, I loved being one of the expats, in the country, I loved driving a car, that has British diplomatic plate on, the police can't stop me, at checkpoint, I loved that, and I loved meeting other expats, who were all here, in that same country, to build this country up, like the same mission, and when I got to Hong Kong, I knew nobody, but my relatives in Yun Long, and I felt lost, I felt why am I here, what is my identity, and thankfully, the organization that sent me here, they said one thing, you're only here to make disciples, that's it, don't worry about anything else, you're here, you make disciples, you keep walking with God,

Koram there, living before the face of God, and everything will work out, and nine years later, I found a family, I found a spiritual family, and I found so much more, more importantly, I found my identity, that is not rooted in being, needing to be in the front lines, of mission work actually, that as we're going to find out, later mission is everywhere, identity precedes mission, you cannot have it, the other way around, we will grow tired, religion does that, religion says, I obey, therefore, I will be accepted, the gospel says, I am accepted, therefore, I will obey, A.W. Tozer, has an even nicer way, of saying this, he said, we're not saved, by good works, we're saved, for good works, we're not saved, by good works, we're saved, for good works, and so Abraham's new identity, completely shifts, not just his own family, and the family to come, but it shifts the nations, it shifts the whole world, in fact, we're all standing here, because of Abraham, coming to live missionally, in his name, in his identity, so I mentioned briefly,

[21 : 27] I worked in Zambia, before I came to Hong Kong, and at that time, I was working with the UK government, UK aid arm, so it was very secular, we're literally encouraged, to not talk about faith, and religion, and prayer, but I remember, leaving this work, and joining the current charity, I'm with Hope International, which is very gospel centric, which is all about, discipleship first, and building up the local church, as we help the poor, and so, one thing I kept seeing, that was so different, night and day, was we'd helped all these beneficiaries, these families, with the same type of tools, financial tools, literacy, loans, and teaching them how to run businesses, teaching them how to fish, for themselves, but family A, when I worked with the government, not allowed to mention faith, or dignity, or identity, or discipleship, every family that we helped here, the first thing they'll say is, thanks for helping us, we really do appreciate it, how do we get out of here, can you get us out of this country, get us into England, change the destiny for my family, which is again, many of us would think like that, if we were living in some country, if we won a lottery today, some of us might just disappear, and we won't see them again, but on this side, when we were helping them, with the same tools, then they were, getting a stable income, they were getting a livelihood, they were teaching them how to farm, and yield much better harvest, but at the same time, as we're discipling them, talking about identity, talking about dignity, the first question that they ask me, after they get helped, they say thank you, they say, they actually don't say thank you to us, they say thank you to the local church, because we're actually, acting on behalf of the local church, and then they're like, can you help my neighbor, can you help my sister, can you help my cousin, it wasn't

about their own self-preservation, of their own family, getting out of poverty, it was about, how do we bless the next person, and we're like, that's great, because that very loan, that we gave you to start that business, now that you've paid it back, we can now give it to your neighbor, to do the same thing, so you're in fact, part of that blessing, of blessing, and paying it forward, to the next person, and so many of us in Hong Kong, especially in Asia, we have a tendency, we're very good at planning, for our family well, for our next generation, we make sure, that our next generation, has enough, yet there's still family arguments, and disputes, in every single family, when it comes to inheritance, but how much is enough, how much is enough, that your family is sorted, and locked after, what about, the many brothers and sisters, around the world, who do not have, a chance to plan, for their kids,

Abraham's story, was so much bigger than himself, it was to bless the nations, it wasn't just so him, and Sarah could retire happily, worship with his grandkids, and that's it, God had a bigger plan, and I'm going to take you, to Rwanda for a moment, we're going to watch, a short video, this is a real story, and this is the reason, that I left Zambia, reluctantly, to come to Hong Kong, because I met so many lives, like Severa, we're going to read, in here, whose lives, before we met them, were completely worthless, and if you asked Severa, a few years, before we filmed the video, what was her worth, she'd probably say, a bit less, than the cow, a bit less than the chicken, and when I first heard it, I broke down in tears, because I, that wasn't even a concept, but my dad loves, the family cow, and the chickens, much more than I do, they love me, he loves me, because, these are assets, these are livestock, these bring money, into the family, having a daughter, doesn't, and she's living, in a country, that's torn, apart by identity, by genocide, by names, by labels, and so when we met her, she was absolutely, fell out nothing, but through the local church, we reminded her of her identity, her truth, her dignity, and she became a blessing, to her neighborhood, and it's stories like that, that actually got me out, of Zambia, and said, you know what, I care too much, about these families, I want more people, to be like her, to find their identity, and start living it out, that it doesn't matter, where I live, I can live in a country, I've never lived in, if my job is to share their stories, that's worth it, I prefer to be on the field, I prefer to go to visit my elephants, every weekend, but it's okay, if I truly care for them, it doesn't matter where I am, in the line of helping them, and so Matthew, if you could put up the video, that'd be fantastic. My name is Savera Mutayemaria, I have four kids, and I look after eight more. Like many people, in the community, of Kigaburo, Rwanda, Savera and her husband, supported their family, mostly through, what they grow in their fields, making it difficult, to consistently provide, for their family's needs.

When Savera, heard about, Ruego Bank, Hope's microfinance bank, in Rwanda, it sounded too good, to be true. It felt impossible, because at that time, women did not feel comfortable, going to banks.

[26 : 16] Loans were mostly given to men. When I first heard about Ruego, I was surprised, that there was a bank, that cares for, and welcomes women, eagerly.

As soon as I heard that, I was among the first to go. Taking her first loan, from Ruego, in 2006, Savera started a business, selling peanuts, at a local market.

Before I heard that news, about that bank, they call Ruego, you could understand, that my life was bad. Getting food, was very hard. I didn't have a house.

I had three kids, but I wasn't even able, to pay for primary school fees. I started to realize, that I was capable.

I used to believe, I couldn't do much, but I came to realize, that I was quite capable. With her entrepreneurial spirit, savings, and loans from Ruego, Savera has expanded, to a number of different businesses, over the last 11 years.

[27 : 33] Employing 50 people, in her community, Savera today manages, a supermarket, a hardware shop, farming activity, a painting business, a carpentry, and welding business, and several rental properties.

Passionate about, developing her community, Savera serves those around her, in countless ways. She has adopted, eight orphans, in addition, to paying for school fees, and health insurance, for many of her neighbors, and employees.

She allows her employees, to take food from her fields, to support their families, and she built wells, in her community, so that her neighbors, could have easy access, to clean water. When you have a relationship, with God, you understand, that what God has given you, is for your benefit, but also,

for the benefit, of those around you.

You have to share, with those in need. Everything that I do now, I do, with gratitude, in my heart. I want to take, what God has given me, and use it, to help people.

Hello. Yeah, there's also a picture, I think next, I asked Gabe to put up. This is us in Rwanda, with Josh as well, we were there in 2022, visiting farmers, visiting many, many different clients, like Severa, who found dignity, who found Christ, but more importantly, they lived it out, to be a blessing, not just for their own families, and Gabe and I, we spent a whole day, with Josh, making coffee, we were picking coffee beans, from the trees, mashing them up, grinding them, and just to make one cup of coffee, took us eight hours.

[29 : 31] So thank God, we don't work for Starbucks here. That was a great experience, but yeah, we can take the picture off, whereas Gabe's handsome face, his angel glow, will distract us, those brows man.

What was I going to say? Yeah, so yeah, this is what we do, is hope. We were, we came into this country, five years after the genocide, where there was brutal killing, and we were the first to learn to women, and now we're the first to learn to those, with disabilities as well, because we really believe, not just in the gospel, because we can, we plant, we've, five main denominations in Rwanda, all work with us, they run our programs, but as we preach, great sermons every week, but if 90% of the congregation, are hungry, are not able to pay, for their own food, then we have to offer something more, than just the word of God, we need to ask them, practical tools, and so together, we really see that, identity change, and that Severa, wasn't living for herself anymore, she didn't want to get out, and get me out of here, and live in, the great land of somewhere else, but no, she decided to stay, and be a blessing to others, earlier at the start, I gave the analogy of, you know, building our identities, is like building sandcastles, waiting to be swept away, Severa for me, and for many others, like her, they're more like a lighthouse, that God calls us to, we still need to be by the sea, we still need to be close, to the storm, but it's dark, people are drowning, in anxiety, and identity, and so many different issues, that we're facing today, but we're called to be a lighthouse, a lighthouse, that people can see, in the midst of a storm, people can follow, and finally, we can point them home, just like England, and the World Cup, now guys,

I wish I could finish the sermon here, I really wish, it's 12 o'clock, it'll be a bit early, Alice can come and do like, four more songs, and I'd love to leave, the rest of the chapter, for my brother next week, but we can't teach, about Genesis 17, without talking about, circumcision, it's painful, literally, it's painful, it's vulnerable, it's intimate, it's raw, it's hidden, but it's also, the way that God, introduced the covenant, you know, it's so easy, to say, Abraham, you have a new name, I saw your mistakes, live it out, bless the nations, done, wouldn't we all love that, wouldn't we all, you know, love that CEO title, without putting in, the years of work, wouldn't we love, getting Uday's body, without ever stepping foot, and Kenneth's body, stepping foot into the gym, we would love that, we would love that quick, and then we can start living, that way, and experiencing the blessings, of all of that, but no, the covenant comes at a cost, it comes at an obedience, and this is where, the circumcision, is introduced, and we're not going to go, too deep into it, but what I will say is, that you can't have, a new identity, without cutting away your old,

I can't be reinventing myself, it's a new me, it's a new name, but still living in the old ways, old habits, old sins, new identity, demands everything, and Paul, thankfully, is the covenant, the people of the new covenant, Paul, in Colossians, in Romans, he talks about another type, of circumcision, the circumcision, of the heart, equally painful, circumcision, of just, kind of tearing out, our old identity, and being solely, anchored, in Christ, and we don't talk about, the cost, so much, of following Christ, but sometimes, I think it's important, that we do, because Paul talks about it, and actually, Paul lives it out, and Jesus went through, the cost, and so we might even ask, why would an all sufficient God, God Almighty, require this, from Abraham, why, he doesn't need anything, he's the God Almighty, he's El Shaddai, he doesn't need anything, or anyone, yet why does he need us, to cut off, this part of our body, and circumcise, and I think, it's interesting, because the very promise, that Abraham received, was to multiply, and for all the male, in his household, they all needed to circumcise,

I think it was a very, tangible, permanent, physical reminder, that as they reproduce kids, as they have more children, that is not by their own strength, but by the power of God, but by the covenant, that God had given them, and God's not introducing circumcision, because it's, just for jokes, no, God's cutting things, away from us, so that we can make, room for new things, to make, room for a

harvest, and, I think, there's another verse here, it says, on the eighth day, you shall circumcise, this is just a random fact, that I found, thanks to AI, that, apparently, even today, it's on the eighth day, that the baby has this, vitamin K, or whatever, that helps handle blood clots, if you, cut it before the eight days, it could actually have blood clots, and actually cause, serious issues, but you see, even in the intricacy, of God commanding us, to do that, he's well thought out, actually, on the eighth day, you do this, when the baby, has enough, whatever, and for those, who want to learn more, about circumcision, Dr. Trevor's sitting right here, he'd love to explain, the science of all that, so it happens, when you're in my group, again,

[34 : 20] Trevor the Rev, will tell you that, but again, back to the new covenant, Paul talks about, the circumcision of hearts, he talks about, the cost of following Jesus, when I think of one story, I think I'm going to share, one more story, and then we're going to, slowly wrap up, is there's a story, of following Christ, when you think about, a group of kids, that I had heard, who knew their identity, who were truly circumcised, at the heart, and their identity, was so anchored in Christ, neighboring country, to Zavira, when she was growing up, in the 90s, is neighboring, a few miles away, in a country called Burundi, during that time, there was this ethnic, there were, this people, of the same ethnic group, but two different tribes, that were fighting each other, same ethnicity, same language, same culture, it was solely, because of social casting, that these people, were put into two different tribes, the Hutus, and the Tutsis, in Rwanda, Gabe and Josh, and I got to visit, the genocide museum in Rwanda, but neighboring Burundi, also had the same genocide, but the violence actually, was on both sides, and there was the Hutus, and the Tutsis, and during 1997, there was a boys,

Catholic school, a boys Catholic school, in a small town, they were doing life together, and they're age 12 to 20, and I, it's close to my heart, because I think of Ruben, I think of my nephew, who's a teenager, him and his mates, living in the dorm, doing life together, reading the words together, playing football together, but during this, violence of genocide, happening in their country, and in 1997, the Hutu, rebel army, were going from village to village, going from school to school, going in, and separating the kids, and people, adults alike, from the two tribes, Hutus and Tutsis, completely just massacring, the other side, and these boys, as they were getting ready, for bed one day, they could hear, this rebel army, they were just, this mob mentality, they were chanting, as they would go from village, to village, and again, same ethnicity, same language, same culture, you cannot tell the difference, it's like people living in Hong Kong, and Kowloon, the dark side, maybe, that's it, maybe the dark of a night, but Hong Kong,

Kowloon, Tongchung, you can't tell, who's from who, you have to be honest about, okay, actually I'm from this side of town, but they were going from, village to village, and we're going to these, different places, and the kids could hear this singing, they all ran under their beds, praying that, I pray that they don't go into our school, and then they got, the singing got closer, and the chanting got closer, and I pray that they don't find our classroom, or our dormitory, ultimately their worst fear happened, and they could hear the chanting, enter their own dorm room, and as they were all standing, hiding underneath their beds, they held hands, they wouldn't let each other go, and they prepared for this mentally, they knew this day could come, but it finally did come, the army walks in and says, the military man and says, ours on this side, the other's on this side, in French, the boys reluctantly, one by one, came out under the bed, still holding hands, intentionally, they were stood together, Hutus and Tutsis, they did not let go, of each of us hands, half of that room, could have escaped easily, that day, just by saying, hey,

I'm from Kowloon, I'm from Kowloon, we're good, walk on one side, and they're saved, but no, those teenage boys, held hands, and there's one boy, called Oscar Nizabira, who actually said, to the person, pointing the gun at them, saying, no, we're not Hutus, we're not Tutsis, we're children of God, we're children of God, and today, they're known as the, martyrs of the fraternity, and today, if you go to Burundi, there is a seminary, built with a sanctuary, of their names on it, today, they're actually on the list, in the Pope Vatican, waiting to be sainted, what the boys, didn't know, what they did that day, was that they stood, in their identity in Christ, because they knew, that their identity in Christ, was worth more, than their lives, worth more than, what the world, could label them, and another, interesting fact, was actually, after, this massacre, usually, what happens is, there's always some type, of revenge, retaliation, revenge killing, but after people, found out, what these boys did, in the village of Buddha, to this day, there remains peace, because nobody, was able to pick up a weapon, after hearing, what the boys did, and I'm sharing this story, because it's real, it's powerful,

but they're teenagers, teenagers, knew the identity of Christ, do we know, the identity of Christ, do we know, that this identity, that God's given us, is worth more, than our lives, more importantly, there comes, another ancestor, a descendant of Abraham, 2000 years after him, a descendant of Abraham, and Sarah, who walked up this hill, on a Friday evening, in Gogolpha, and he took, not just the violence, of his country, he took the violence, of the whole world, and hung on that cross, for you and I, now those boys, teenage boys, through their death, brought peace to a village, in Africa, but the death of Christ, the son of God, brought peace to whole, mankind, the whole universe, for all time, but there's a big difference, those boys stood, in the identity, that they received, in Christ, when Jesus went up, to that cross, he wasn't standing, for his identity, he stood, and stayed on that cross, to give up, his very identity, of God, give up his very name, of Jesus, so that you and I, today, in Hong Kong, in 2026, could be called, children of God, through his name, Jesus, this is the Jesus, that we worship, this is the one, he followed, he did not count, equality with God, as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form, of a servant, being found, in the likeness of man, being found, in human form, he humbled himself, being obedient, to the point of death, even death, on a cross, so that God, will bestow upon him, the name that is above, every single name, that every tongue, will confess, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every knee will bow, and say that Jesus Christ, is Lord, that is the descendant, of Abraham, that we follow today, and that, what happened on that cross, was the ultimate circumcision, when he was cut off, from God, so that we may be connected, to him, once and for all, so guys, as we wrap up, it's time to start, building sandcastles, it's too tiring, we don't have time for this, stop trying to build, our own identity, stop trying to save face, and give face, at the end of the Bible, in Revelation, Jesus comes back, and says, I will give them a white stone, with a new name, written on that stone, that no one knows, except the one, who receives it, [41:07] Jesus again says, I will give them a white stone, with a new name, written on the stone, that no one knows, except the one, who receives it, Tim Keller says this about it, it says, the secret name, that God's unique, the secret name, that's written on this stone, is God's unique, intimate view of you, tomorrow morning, we're going to head to work, we're going to have a, yeah, feel free, we're going to have a, whole inbox, telling you, that you're insufficient, we're going to have, the whole world, giving you labels, that you're not enough, we're going to look at your bank account, and say, that's not a lot, we're going to look at your job title, and be like, that's not very high, it's going to look at your relationship status, and say, oh no, that's a bit of a mess, it's going to want you to feel rejected, unwanted, not enough, and it's going to make you want to scramble, to hustle, to build your own identity again, build your sandcastles, guys, it's time to, let go of, living in a way, that we're just trying to save face, or we're just trying to lose face, let's live, in the face of God, let's fall in the face of God, and worship, and actually, the only face that matters guys, is, is the one on that cross, who looked down at each, and every one of us, and says, you're mine, the one who looks at us, and writes, on this white stone, a name that's just for you, identity is received, identity precedes, our mission, and our mission, is for the nations, remember,

Savera, that we're blessed to be a blessing, remember Oscar, the identity that we have in Christ, let us pray, Father, Father, we, fall at, fall at your face, we're tired of building, our sandcastles, help us receive, this identity, that you've called us, as beloved sons, and daughters, thank you, for what you did on that cross, for giving up, your own identity, your own name, just so that we may be saved, Lord, Lord, as we worship, as we reflect, with this following song, Holy Spirit, continue to speak, even when I'm not speaking, Holy Spirit, will you, tear down, any names and labels, that the world has given us, that we've even, given ourselves, and as we lay that down, may we, receive, the name you give us, so let us worship,

I encourage you all, to stay seated, as we reflect, and we'll let Alex, lead a song,