



DEVOTIONAL FOR MATTHEW 15-16; MARK 7-8

AUTHOR: AMBER HARPER

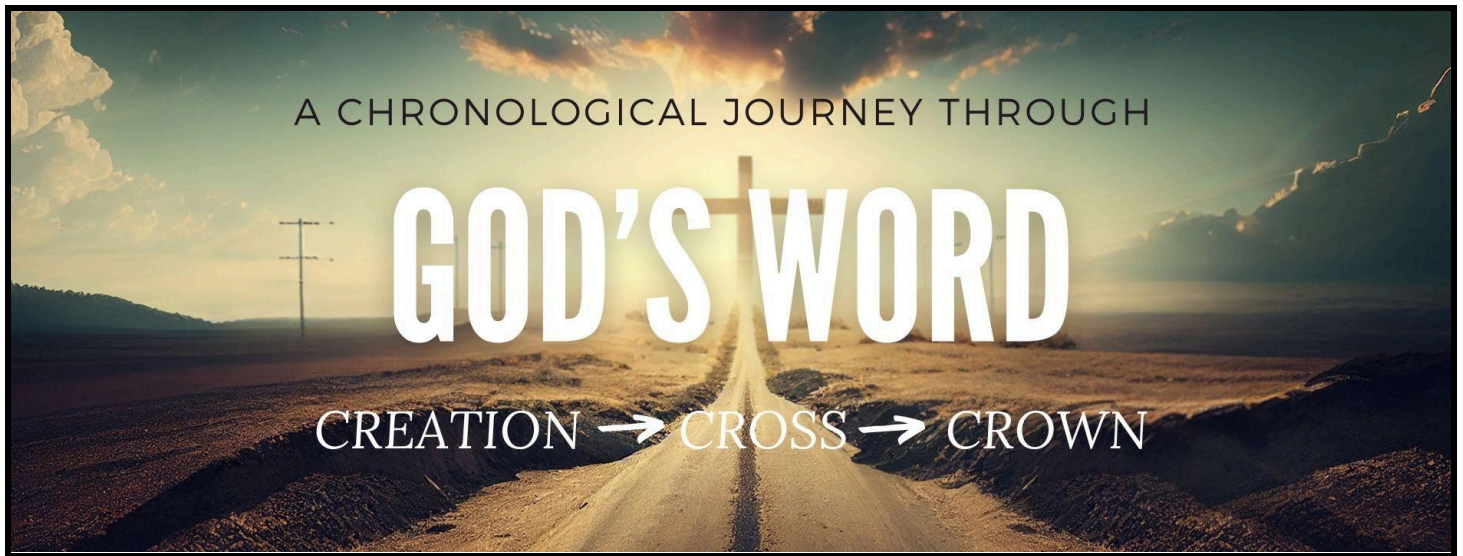
There comes a point in time in each of our lives when we are faced with questions about our identity, such as, "Who am I?" or "Why am I here?" How would you answer these questions? What informs your answers to these questions?

So many of the struggles I have had to work through have stemmed from not knowing who I am. Let me explain. I have tirelessly searched for my identity in all the wrong places, which has left me feeling ashamed, disappointed, and hurt. One of my biggest struggles has been keeping up appearances. I always sought to appear as if I had it all together. I would feel weak or like a failure if I showed others that I was really struggling. This finds its deep roots in pride and I still need the Lord's work in this area of my life.

I know many of us scoff at the famously religious Pharisees and Sadducees. I have! This passage has been eye opening and has pricked my heart as Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. Jesus, who values relationship over tradition, teaches this religious group as well as His disciples what God desires. You see, they were more worried about how they appeared on the outside rather than examining their hearts. Jesus clearly informed them it is what comes out of the heart that defiles each person (Matthew 15:11, 18). The Lord has always cared more about our hearts than our lip service (Isaiah 29:13). He alone knows our hearts' depravity and its capabilities.

The faith of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28), the healing of many (Matthew 15:29-31), the feeding of the four thousand (Matthew 15:32-39), the warning given by Jesus to His disciples to beware of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:1-12), all of these events have been used by the Lord as a tool to strengthen His disciples' faith. They lead up to one moment in time when Jesus asks His disciples an interesting question, "Who do *others* say I am?" They answered him, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14). However, the question that follows is perhaps the most important question we will ever be faced with, more important than, "Who am I?" Jesus asks pointedly, "But who do *you* say I am?" Once again, Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. Peter, who was bold in his response, declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The answer that Peter wisely proclaimed was foundational to the teachings which Jesus would soon share with his disciples. It was *after* Peter's declaration of who Jesus is that Matthew writes, "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples..." (Matthew 16:21). It's almost like Jesus was saying, "Now that I know what you believe about me, we can



go deeper and move on to the more serious matter of why I came." When we know who He is, we can confidently move forward in who we are and to what He has called us to do.

Once we have heard the gospel, we must all give an account for who we say He is (Romans 14:12).

Famous theologian C.S.Lewis says, "I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic— on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg— or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." *-Mere Christianity*

So I ask you, who do you say He is? The way you answer this question will determine your answer to the question, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?"

Questions:

1. Have you ever cared more about what's on the outside than the inside? What is the root cause of that and how can you overcome what others think of you?
2. What do you believe about Jesus? Do you see how your answer to this question affects every area of your life?
3. Are you searching to find out who you are? Have you asked God to examine your heart? Jen Wilkin says, "There is no true knowledge of self apart from the knowledge of God." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?