

**WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?
A VALUABLE LIFE
FEBRUARY 24, 2013**

Did you see the movie, The Sixth Sense?

It was out 1999, but it still comes around on some cable channels.

The film tells the story of Cole Sear,

a troubled, isolated boy who is able to see and talk to the dead,

and an equally troubled child psychologist played by Bruce Willis who tries to help him.

Once Crowe, the psychologist earns the boy's trust,

Cole eventually confides in him that,

"I see dead people... walking around like regular people."

Though Crowe at first thinks Cole is delusional,

he eventually comes to believe that Cole is telling the truth.

He suggests to Cole that he should try to find a purpose for his gift

by communicating with the ghosts

and perhaps aid them with their unfinished business on earth.

Cole at first does not want to since the ghosts terrify him,

but he finally decides to try it.

Now I'll give a spoiler alert.

If you haven't seen the movie, but you're going to, plug your ears.

Crowe, the psychologist, was dead the whole time,

but didn't realize it.

Only the little boy could see him as a ghost.

And he helped him with his unfinished business here on earth.

He was dead, but didn't realize it.

I'm convinced there are a lot of people walking around just like that, dead and don't know it.

Oh, they've got breathe and a pulse,

but they're spiritually dead.

Their bodies have just not caught up with their spirits.

Maybe that's why zombie movies and TV shows are big right now.

There are places where people get dressed up and made up like zombies and do a "Zombie Walk."

Von Ormy, just southwest of town, has a zombie festival.

They call it "Von Zom."

And there are people actually planning for the Zombie Apocalypse.

I think a lot of people today are spiritual zombies.

There's a lack of life, a lack of depth, an emptiness.

And they might try to fill that emptiness with all sorts of things.

It's like when you're hanging on the refrigerator,

"I want something.

What do I want?

No, I don't want that, not that, not that, no."

Digging in the back where the science experiments grow.

"I want something, but I don't know what."

Some people go through life rummaging through the shelves looking for something.

Money, sex, a promotion, a new car, alcohol, a new spouse, more stuff.

And nothing quite does it.

They are seeking to have their lives validated, fulfilled.

And they're not finding it.

But without God there is no inherent meaning or value of human life.

You are simply the latest result of billions of years of random, accidental bio-chemical processes.

So Ingrid Newkirk, the founder of PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals,
could say,

“A rat is pig is a dog is a boy.”

Your value is only found in what someone else thinks or feels about you,
what you can contribute to their life.

So the very young, the very old, the disabled, are at risk.

They don't produce.

They don't achieve.

Some see them as a burden, a drain on society.

Their lives become disposable.

You can see how that's playing out today,

starting with millions of abortions

and folks in nursing homes who never get a visit.

People are hungry to know their lives count for something,

that they have value.

Not just achieved value in the eyes of others,

but inherent value.

What they're looking for is God.

It is only in a growing relationship with God that we find life that can be called “abundant.”

Only in a relationship with our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer

do we find the true value of our lives.

But we tend to grow up seeking our value in what other people think of us.

We either want them to love us for who we are or to be impressed with what we do.

You can figure out which type you are by answering a simple question:

What makes me more upset?

If someone criticizes me or if they reject me?

It all starts taking shape in our childhood.

Maybe you had a parent or parents who you saw as hypercritical.

They were strict disciplinarians.

My dad loved a line from his days at West Point,

“When I say jump, you jump,

and you can ask, ‘How high?’ on the way up.”

In the strict home there are lots of rules, mostly “thou shalt nots.”

One toe over the line is enough to really get it.

If your report card was all As and one B,

guess which grade got the attention.

You worked hard to measure up,

and worried that you might fall short.

Because if you don't measure up,

you're not worth much.

Or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, maybe you had parents who didn't show you much affection,

and you're not really sure you were loved.

Maybe you were somewhere in the middle of the birth order,

or you had a special needs sibling,

and you feel like you got lost in the shuffle.

Someone may have gotten attention,

but it wasn't you.

Maybe hugs and kisses and the words, "I love you," were not part of the family routine.

Perhaps a parent was emotionally absent or distant.

You might have tried to get more attention,

but it felt like nothing worked.

And you felt like you didn't belong.

But you so wanted to belong.

So you wouldn't dare tell them how you felt,

because that might make them like you even less.

Guess what.

We almost always continue to play those roles in adulthood.

Those who grew up in strict household try to find their value in

what they can do, what they accomplish, how well they perform,

and other people showing approval.

They may veer into workaholism.

They might feel worry and anxiety over whether they're doing good enough.

And they're hesitant to try new things,

especially if someone else is watching,

because they might not do it right the first time.

And those who grew up feeling some distance from their parents try to find their value in someone else loving them.

They may reach out for any and every relationship,

including very unhealthy and even abusive relationships,

because they feel like a bad relationship is better than nothing.

Their feelings are out in the open,

for easy access by anyone.

Anything to feel like they're loved.

And we bring that baggage into our marriages,

where we try to get validation from our spouses,

always watching every little clue to see if

we're loved or approved of.

We're trying to find our life's value by filling deficits we felt in childhood.

And when we're doing that,

the ground beneath our feet always feels a bit shaky.

What if they change their mind about me?

What if I mess this up?

We're building our self-esteem, our sense of value,

on sand rather than solid ground.

(Mt.7:26)

No husband or wife, no boss or parent,

can adequately and securely fulfill our need.

The only solid foundation for the value of your life is found in God.

The beginning of your value is found in the beginning of the Bible.

You were created by God.

Not by mindless, random biochemical processes

that accidentally burped you up out of the primordial soup.

You were created by God.

You were created in the image of God.

(Ge.1:27)

NOT the same as the rat, the pig or the dog,

but uniquely created in the image of God.

You were created for a relationship with God.
 Whatever else you do with your life,
 this is number one in God's plan.
 A relationship with you.
 You were created to be a steward for God,
 his representative on earth, tending and taking care of what is His. (Ge.1:28; 2:15)

Granted, human sin has gotten in the way of all that.
 We go through too many days without a thought about God.
 Sometimes it's outright defiance of God.
 And when we do turn toward God
 we sometimes feel like he is a million miles away.
 But God does not feel that way about you.
 Jesus said God is so interested in you,
 so invested in you,
 that "even the hairs of your head are all counted." (Mt.10:30)

God is so invested in you he sent his only Son Jesus to save you.
 Remember, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son Jesus." (Jn.3:16)
 He gave his only son Jesus... for you.
 Have you considered what that means about the value of your life?
 We may haggle over how much we're going to pay for a car.
 We shop Walmart for the best deals.
 We cringe when signing on the dotted line for a mortgage.
 It's all about the cost.
 But God the Father paid the ultimate price for you,
 giving up his beloved Son on the cross.
 God the Father paid a huge price for you.
 God the Son paid the ultimate price for you,
 taking your sins onto himself,
 and therefore being separated from the Father
 for the first time in all eternity,
 and dying on the cross to take the punishment your sins deserved.
 He paid the price in the spiritual and physical realm.

1 Peter says, "You were ransomed from futile ways...
 not with perishable things like silver or gold,
 but with the precious blood of Christ." (1Pe.1:18-19)

And Paul said, "You are not your own;
 you were bought at a price." (1Cor.6:19)
 You were bought at the highest price ever paid for anything.
 This year it cost \$4 million for a 30 second commercial during the Superbowl.
 But that's nothing compared to the price God paid for you.
 Bill Gates and Warren Buffet together could not pay that price.

The Father and the Son gave everything for you.
 And, when you put your trust in Jesus,
 the Holy Spirit leaves heaven, leaves heaven,
 and comes to take up residence in you.
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all gave up something valuable... for you.
 God says the value of your life is beyond the world's ability to pay,
 beyond our ability to comprehend.
 And whenever you doubt the value of your own life,

you're saying God didn't know what he was doing
 when he paid that price for you.
 Do you really want to say God was wrong?
 Do you really want to say that your evaluation of you
 is better than God's evaluation of you?

If you struggle with this thing of wondering what your value is,
 self-esteem, self-worth, and such...

if you're one of those people who thinks,

"I was born so ugly,

my Mama tied a bone around my neck to get the dog to play with me,"

it might help if you spent some regular time

memorizing and meditating on the Scriptures in this sermon.

They're listed in your bulletin.

Take it home with you.

Look up those scripture verses.

Rewrite them, and put your own name in them.

God so loved Jesse that he gave his only Son.

Bill, you are not your own.

You were bought with a price.

Kim, you are created in the image and likeness of God.

Mike, you were ransomed from futile ways...

not with perishable things like silver or gold,

but with the precious blood of Christ.

That's how valuable you are to God.

Rewrite those verses with your name in them.

Then read them to yourself, out loud.

Ponder what they mean, each word.

If you do that, you're engaging numerous learning styles:

Tactile, visual, auditory.

And it's more likely to eventually sink in.

In fact, let's read and say these scriptural truths together right now.

(ON SCREEN)

I am created in the image of God.

I was created to be God's representative in his creation.

God knows the number of hairs on my head.

God so loved me that he gave his only Son.

I am not my own. I was bought with a price.

I was ransomed, not with perishable things like silver or gold,

but with the precious blood of Christ.

Every one of us needs to internalize this truth about ourselves,

the tremendous value God sees in us,

the tremendous value God creates in us.

We live in a time when there are a growing number of people who are skeptical of Christianity,
 and even religion in general.

In the most recent polls that ask about religious preference,

one of the fastest growing categories is those who answered, "none."

No religious preference.

There are lots of people who do not see that being a Christian really makes much of a difference.

And, sadly, there are lots of church-folks who, if asked,

could not articulate what difference Jesus makes.

But you can.

When someone asks you,

“What difference does it make that you’re a Christian?”

you can answer,

“I know my life is valuable, incredibly valuable, to God.”

And then you can ask them,

“Do you know how much your life is worth to God?”

And then just see where that conversation goes.

SERMON NOTES

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You were created to be God’s representative in his creation. (Ge.1:27; 2:15)

God knows the number of hairs on your head. (Mt.10:30)

God so loved you that he gave his only Son. (Jn.3:16)

You are not your own. You were bought with a price. (1Cor.6:19)

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