

# Who are you? I am a Child of the King!

1 John 3.1-3

Introduction:

The people in South Central L.A. are having an identity crisis. They have based their hopes on a King, named Rodney. Their whole history was culminated in this one man. They based 27 years of tension, 130 years of frustration and over 400 years of hopelessness in this country in one man, a King. He, through the faulty verdict, proved to be a false hope for them. Their identity as humans and citizens on equal footing with others was literally beaten and the world saw this, and the verdict affirms this, and now they "know" this. What followed was a re-action which the stereotype of these people predicted: they lived up, or down (depending upon your perspective), to what others thought of them. They re-acted as "hoodlums." The world around them, namely the US and specifically LA, considers most blacks to be gang-bangers: they acted as "gang-bangers."

Allow me to illustrate this point. I grew up in Carson, home of the Crips and Pyroos. As most know, I was mugged on a daily basis for money and durable goods. My attitude towards blacks has been coloured. Yet, now, my best friend is black. This shows me that my attitude toward blacks have changed. But an interesting incident occurred this past Thursday (30 April 1992) that showed me that I, too, agreed with the stereo-type. One of the people from EFCSB was driving in South Central on Wednesday night, after the riots began. He was one of the many who was injured in the rioting. He was shot in the chest. After Dan bribed a local family, they took him to Martin Luther King Hospital in Compton. On Thursday, Dan and I decided to visit him and present the Gospel to him. Such noble and grandiose plans fell victim to stereo-type. We were heading up Wilmington Blvd. and ran into the locals looting a liquor store. We passed them with great expediency, then came the test. A rather large gentleman was crossing the street with his hand in the air displaying the Crip hand signal (a "C" in sign language). I notice this real quick and told Dan, who was driving the church van. He immediately rabbited out of the area. With much fear and stupidity we did leave the area but not after having objects thrown at the church van. We never did get to see Jean to present the Gospel to him.

We all hold to some stereo-type and we do expect people to re-act to that stereo-type, in one way or another. The people of South Central LA, with sinful re-actions to their false identity, will cry out the truth of the poem in the bulletin.

Lend me your hope for awhile,

I seem to have mislaid mine.

Lost and hopeless feelings accompany me daily,  
pain and confusion are my companions.

I know not where to turn;

looking ahead to future times does not bring forth images of renewed hope.

I see troubled times, pain filled days, and more tragedy.

Lend me your hope for awhile,

I seem to have mislaid mine.

Hold my hand and hug me;

listen to all my ramblings, recovery seems so far distant.

The road to healing seems like a long and lonely one.

Lend me your hope for awhile,

I seem to have mislaid mine.

Stand by me, offer me your presence, your heart and your love.

Acknowledge my pain, it is so real and ever present.

I am overwhelmed with sad and conflicting thoughts.

Lend me your hope for awhile;

a time will come when I will heal,

and I will share my renewal, hope and love with others.

(author unknown)

Allow me to ask you a question: Who are you?

Picture this dialogue as an answer to that question:

1.Excuse me, but, who are you? Have you thought about that?

2.Well...sure. I'm Fred Smith.

1.No, I mean who are you? Not just your name.

2.Oh...well, I live in Monrovia, and--

1.Excuse me. But let's try again. Who are you?

2.You know. I'm the guy who drives the red Mitsubishi. I work at Denny in Arcadia. My sister married the son of the owner of Carl's Jr.

1.No--you misunderstand me. I'm asking you who you are--way down deep inside. Who are you?

2.Come on now, this is getting stupid. I'm a member of the human race. What planet did you come from?

1.Let's try it again, who are you?

2.Who am I? I'm a Baptist. Sure am. No--wait--I get you now. I'm a Christian--you know.

1.Tell me.

2.Well, he's a person who has accepted Christ.

1.But I didn't ask you what you've done. I asked you who you are.

Is who you are determined by what you do, your name, your address, your church, your height and weight; or, is what you do determined by who you are? The people in South Central LA lived up to the stereo-type of who-you-are-is-determined-by-what-you-do syndrome and forgot the what-you-do-is-determined-by-who-you-are truth. We as Christians sometimes forget as-well.

When we think of who we are, we think in terms of what we have done or hope to do. We think in terms of: I'm a student, a businessman, a teacher, a basketball player; I'll be a father or mother.

What happens though when what you do is taken away?

"I'm a student." What happens to your identity when you graduate, if you graduate? Then, who are you?

"I'm a businessman." When the economy goes sour, your place burned down and you are looted, what becomes of your identity? Who are you?

"I'm a singer." What happens when your voice goes, who are you then?

"I'm a mother." What happens when the children leave or die? Who are you then?

"A cross-country runner." What happens when you are kicked off the team or incur an injury, who are you then?

This was my goal, my way of being somebody in high school. While there I was classified as a "nerd". I had above average intelligence (sometimes I wonder if I still have it). One thing I was not and that was popular. In my senior year I tried for popularity. If I could run far and fast I would finally be somebody, popular.

Believe it or not, I became somebody during those first few months of my senior year. I wasn't the fastest but I was exciting to watch. I knew how to play the cross-country crowd. I was six-feet tall and weighed 150 pounds--grace in action. I would run the first two-and-one-half miles at a decent pace, with the crowd--even to where I fell behind: 14 minutes. That last half-a-mile was mine. This is where I stood out. I was a fast 200 meter runner and a good half-miler. As we said back then, I booked in that last leg. I ran as hard as I could and as fast as I could. Passing everyone. Hearing the wild cheers of the by-standers (usually cheerleaders). Then with the keen sense of victory in my grasp, I would cross the finish line and tumble to the ground appearing dead tired but soaking the popularity. One thing, it didn't even matter that I was running with the Junior Varsity.

I was somebody: the number three JV runner at Narbonne High School in Harbor City. Until, when we count on things and people for our identity there is always an "until", that fateful day. That day when I lost the league championship for our school. They finally brought me up to the big leagues--Varsity. It was the CIF finals. We were to run a course we had never seen before. The course was easy but unfamiliar. Well, as my usual I stayed with the pack, toward the back. I thought the course was longer. All I needed to do was finish sixth and we had victory. I thought the course was longer. "After this corner," I thought, "after this corner I will speed to victory and steal it from the clutches of the 'enemies.'" Well, that corner, that lousy corner, was 100 feet from

the finish line--no glory only frowns and jeers. I was no longer somebody.

Anthony Campolo once said, quoting from psychologists and sociologists, that we tend to react and think according to what we think the most important person in our life or a large group of people thinks of us. That is, our identity, who we are, is determined by those we uphold as most important or influential in our lives.

He says, if everybody I think is important or a large group thinks that I am brilliant, I will be brilliant; if they think I will be stupid, then I will be stupid. How long, he continues, do you think it would take for me to think I was the best looking person in the entire world, if I was in a room full of people who considered fat white guys to be handsome? It would take no time at all. That room full of people would affirm me.

We will falter if our parents are the most important people in our world. We will falter, like South Central LA, if we place others opinions as our most important influence. We will falter if we hold ourselves to be the most important in the world. Each of these, and others, will fail us, give us wrongs ideas and hopes, will destroy our feelings of self-worth, at one time or another in our lives.

We will not falter if we hold God as the most important person in our life. As Christians, if we believed that God was the most important person in our life, our life would change. Because what He thinks and knows of us is far greater and magnificent than any society or person, including self, could ever be--He calls us His children, we are children of the True King.

Who we are is far more important than what we do or what others may think us to be.

Scripture: 1 John 3.1-3

1 John 3:1-3 tells us something exciting. Let's read those words together. I don't want you to miss the excitement that John must have had as he was writing. Let's look again at those verses.

He said in verse 1, "See how great God's love is for us, for we are called the children of God." He must have been really excited as he wrote those words. What follows is an exciting exclamation. "For this is what we truly are!"

Have you ever thought about that? If I were to repeat the question, "who are you?" This should be your answer: "I am a child of God." Skip the next sentence! Jin Young Chang wanted to ask "Amy, if you would go to your prom with him?" "... when you don't understand the doctrinal truths pertaining to your position in Christ, you have no ground for success in the practical arena" (Victory, 54).

If you remember three weeks ago we talked about who we are. Linus, you remember that sermon, it was called "Butterflies and Kings." In that we learned that we are not called sinners but saints. We do God an injustice when we call ourselves sinners for He calls us saints.

We need to realize that a Christian is not simply a person who gets forgiveness, who gets to go to heaven, who gets the Holy Spirit, who gets a new nature. Remember this a Christian is a person who has become someone he was not before. He becomes a saint. Isn't this the truth that Jesus spoke of in John 3 to Nicodemus? He told him, "You must be born again." He said to him, "Unless you are born again, you will not see the Kingdom of God."

What does Jesus mean by being born again? He says, "That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He makes this new birth analogous with physical birth. Let us consider the similarities. When we are born or conceived we are not being added to something. Being born physically is becoming something that was not there before. Therefore, being born spiritually is to become something that was not there before. It is not getting something added on. In other words, when we received the Holy Spirit, He was not an addition but He caused a transformation. He did not make us to be sinners going to Heaven (Heaven would be the addition). Instead, He transformed us like the caterpillar becoming the butterfly: we once were sinners but now we are saints.

I realize that this concept is easy to understand. But the truths of it we seem to miss. We are like the bird who was mysteriously hatched into a family of rabbits. He never knew he was a bird. Oh, he realized he didn't look like the rest, but they accepted him. He thought he was a rabbit. He hopped with them, ate with them, slept with them. One day another bird came up to him, he said, "Why are you hopping, don't you know you can fly?" The little bird thought about this. "Sure, I guess if I hopped high enough it would look like I was flying." But the bigger bird showed him his wings and said, "No, with these you can really fly."

This is where we are right now. We have just learned an exciting truth. What we do with that truth is of utmost importance. We can either continue thinking we are rabbits or we can start flapping our wings and fly away. Whichever choice we make, the truth will remain the same, we are birds or in this case, saints.

We must remember, who we are is more important than what we do. We must understand who we are. When we understand who we are then we can do the right things. "A productive Christian behaviour system is the by-product of a solid Christian belief system, not the other way around" (Victory, 53).

For example, many times in the past few months people have asked me how to get along with people. "... getting right with each other begins with getting right with God. And getting right with God always begins with settling once and for all the issue that God is your loving Father and you are His accepted child" (Victory, 56). Therefore, we need to know who we are before we know what to do.

This is seen in Paul's writings where he writes to the believers who they are before he tells them what to do. Too often we jump ahead to see what we should do instead of waiting to see who we are. We desire to know how to be in right relationship with people. So we jump to Eph 4-6. We forget to read Eph 1-3 which tells us who we are in Christ and the basis for those right relationship. When we skip the first three chapters and try to practice the last three chapters we will fail. Romans 12.1 shows us this in a simple fashion. Paul writes "Therefore". A rather trite saying concerning this is, "What is the therefore there for?" Paul is saying by that "therefore", everything that you've learned about who you are to God and in God by Christ is now to be applied to your life. In other words, if you don't know chapters 1-11 of Romans don't even think you can do what he asks in the rest of the book of Romans.

Can you see how easy it is to understand this and yet how hard it is to practice. The reason why is it's too great a truth for us to understand. Eph 2.10 tells us that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ. And yet we don't believe it. We think we're still a rabbit, nothing but a sinner saved by grace. Yet He says we are his workmanship. Is God's masterpiece created by simply adding something spiritual onto sinful clay? 2 Co 5.17 tells us that if anyone is in Christ he is a brand new creation; the old is gone, everything is brand new.

At the beginning of the message I talked about being somebody. The only way we can be

somebody is to be in Christ. If we are a teacher one day we will no longer be able to teach. If we are a parent someday we won't be. If we are an athlete one day we will be old, fat, and injured; we are no longer an athlete.

Jesus said all things will pass away. This includes jobs, childhood, parenthood, and activities. But he also said in that same breath, I will never pass away. When our identity is in Christ that identity is forever.

The people in Christianity are having an identity crisis. They have based their hopes on a King, named Jesus. Their whole history was culminated in this one man. They base their lives filled with tension, frustration and hopelessness in one man, a King. He, through the faulty verdict, proved to be a false hope. Our identity as humans was literally beaten, crucified and buried while the world watched, and the verdict upon Him affirmed this, until He rose from the dead. What should follow is a re-action of our true identity in this risen King. Do we live up to what God has stereo-typed us to be or do we live down to what others think of us? Do we re-act as "saints" or "hoodlums"?

Today is a simple message of the truth we find in God, a truth that will never change. Have you ever thought of yourself as something lower than what God does? Some people think that we are more noble than angels yet lower than the worm. This is not so for God calls us His child--now we are His children. Praise Him.

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