

## You Are A Child (of God)

### Acts 3:12-19

#### Intro

Peter and John are walking into the temple in Jerusalem at some point after the day that we know as Pentecost when they are asked for a financial handout. While we don't know the name of the individual who makes this request, we do know some of his backstory. He has been crippled since birth; people who knew him would bring him to the same spot every day to ask for money; he was someone who was recognizable, as strangers who didn't know him, knew who he was once he started leaping around after he was healed.

The people respond to what is happening before them, and Peter reacts to their response with a story (that acts as an explanation). The story is that of Jesus and his resurrection. He has no problems saying that those whom he is talking with are guilty (in some manner or form) of killing Jesus...and he equally has no problem declaring that God's love has been, is, and will continue to be there for them...if they will just claim their new identity. The scripture picks up right after the crippled person who was asking for alms was healed. It reads this way.

### Acts 3:12-19

<sup>12</sup>When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, 'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? <sup>13</sup>The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. <sup>14</sup>But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, <sup>15</sup>and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup>And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

<sup>17</sup> 'And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. <sup>18</sup>In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup>Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

### I John 3:1-7

#### Intro

This new identity is expounded upon in our second reading. It points out that we aren't who God would ultimately have us be...yet. The description is pointed in declaring what is of God, as well as what isn't. The question that I have for you is this: do you recognize yourself as a child of God? The scripture reads this way.

### I John 3:1-7

<sup>3</sup>See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

4 Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup>You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup>No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup>Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

### **'You Are a Child (of God)'**

You are a child.

How do you respond to that statement?

I think that a lot of us hear that statement as more than a little bit of an insult, or at the very least, something that we want to grow out of...and I don't think that sort of response is going to surprise any of us.

Think about it this way: how many of you when you were growing up had a 'Kid's Table' that was separate and distinct from the rest of the family when it came to large family gatherings?

I know I did.

When the larger family got together at Grandma and Grandpa's house, my brothers and cousins knew it was a matter of time before the card table and folding chairs would get pulled out. I couldn't tell you where those things were kept when they weren't in use, but when it was time, they would appear and the children were separated off to a different part of the house to partake of the family meal.

Now when you're 8 and 9 years old that can be kind of fun.

But when you're 15 or 16? Yeah, at that point, being 'a child' isn't so cool anymore.

I think that most of us hear the statement of, 'you are a child' in that sort of vein.

Which is one of the reasons, and I think that it's a pretty big reason, that we tend to struggle with the literary imagery that we are not only 'children of God', but 'little children' who are (as it states in other parts of the Bible) still not ready for solid food.

Yes, we may understand the point that is being articulated, but it leaves many people responding with some variation of a visceral reaction.

'You are a child.'

'No, I'm not!'

But what if we changed it up? Try this on: 'You are a child of God.'

How does that make you feel?

I think if we are able to have an honest conversation, the reality is that while we have moments of liking the idea of being cared for like a child by a heavenly parent, we see ourselves as having advanced

beyond being a child. It isn't necessarily that we have all the answers (we know that we don't), but we certainly feel like we are at the grown-up table.

But why do we feel that way? Do we feel that way because that is a reality that has been placed inside us by God? Or do we feel that way because those are the sentiments that are purported to be true via the wisdom of the world?

I believe that the answer is the latter (exactly, is anyone surprised there). But I say that not from a Neanderthalic place of God: good; world: bad.

Instead I come to that place because of what we hear, what we are told, what we are taught in the Bible. It would be so nice if Jesus were to manifest himself like he did before the disciples. But as was talked about (in some manner or form) last week, Thomas faced that exact situation (not being in the room with the other disciples) and ultimately hears from the resurrected Jesus the following statement: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have still come to believe.'

Well, that's us. That's where we are. We may not be able to put our fingers in the wounds on his hands or our hands in the wounds on his side (and again, those were Thomas' requirements to believe), but that doesn't mean that we are not able to ultimately believe, and believe not the articulation of God as put out there by the world (which changes like the sand on a windswept day), but instead the truth that is found in God's Word which is confirmed by the leading of His Spirit in the midst of our lives (and yes, that was a really long sentence...and it's still true!).

Look, God wants us to be in relationship with Him, but the relationship that is able to be had with the Creator of all is not that of co-equals. If we persist in trying to elevate ourselves to that of God, or pulling the reality of God to that which feels a whole lot more like the person we see in the mirror (thereby assuring ourselves a good seat around the adults table that we have created in our minds), what we are going to be left with are moment upon moment when we need to (as we heard in the passage from Acts) repent. If we aren't able or are unwilling to recognize who we are, if we aren't able or are unwilling to recognize who God is, if we aren't able or are unwilling to abide in the embrace the identity Jesus extended to us through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave, then we will be left feeling perpetually unfulfilled...or at the very least that there's 'something more' out there to be acquired.

You are a child. ↙

You are a child of God!

So let's start to deal with some of the misperceptions/perceptions of the world that taint how we hear that Biblical reality.

Children really don't understand.

I think we know where that one comes from. We look at our kids and, by and large, view them as empty vessels that need to be filled...by us to make them wise, competent, compassionate (whatever we feel as parents is needed by our children which will obviously vacillate from parent to parent).

This perspective places the child as...wanting. That is not a feeling that many of us want to claim.

But if we are to truly follow God, be in relationship with the Almighty, we need to abdicate the throne of authority and realize that not only do we not have all the answers, but that the Creator of all already knows all of our questions (think about that for a second). We need to create a way, every day that allows us to cede that control, letting it go. Just letting it go empowers the Spirit of God to begin to move in. That doesn't mean that all of a sudden we are going to be hearing voices that guide us to do this that or the other thing, but just letting go allows the perspective to begin to shift. You are a child...of God...claim it!

Children are simple

We live in a complex world and the idea that a child is able to grasp the intricacies of why people do what they do feels incredibly far from the truth.

This perspective places the child as...incapable. That is not a feeling that many of us want to claim.

But why is the world complex? Is it complex because of how God works or because of how humanity has screwed it up? I appreciate the fact that I view the Garden of Eden story as emblematic...but that doesn't mean that what its speaking to isn't the truth (again, it's God's Word. If it means anything, it should mean everything.). God told us how to live with each other and with God in love...and then we broke that, sin came into the world, it pervades the world, it pollutes the world, it causes the world to become ever more complex in ways that are contrary to how God would have us live.

That's one of the things that I love about children: they exude, they abound, they express who they are and what they feel. I love the ways that children are able to look out at the world and not see color, but they see people. They look out and move quickly beyond the surface esthetic to the beauty that is able to emanate from just about everyone. They hear about God and they don't worry about being judged, they just know that they are loved.

Anyone? Does that sound like how God would have us live? I think so too: because the Bible told me so.

You are a child...of God...claim it!

Children can't take care of themselves.

Well, there's a truth. Children need to be provided food, clothing, shelter, and direction so as to how to be become, what? Self-sufficient. Totally true. This perspective places the child as...weak, or at the very least vulnerable.

Sorry to burst your bubble on this one, but just because you have developed and acquired skills to provide for the food, clothing, and shelter you need, most of us still get stuck in directions that leave us feeling...well, not quite whole. Are self-medication and addiction rates (as broad and varied as they are) as high as they are because people feel fulfilled? Exactly: not in the least.

We have taken the reality that children are weak and vulnerable and tacked on to that the feeling that we are the ones who need to imbue wisdom and direction.

What does God think about that? I Corinthians 3:18-19 states, 'Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.'

Yes, God wants us to use the gifts that He has blessed us with to care for ourselves and each other's physical needs.

But if we lean on our own devices in order to create our variation of utopia, we will end up leaving ourselves and other woefully disappointed. Yes, we need guidance in regard to the direction of our lives...and we need to lean upon the Creator of all to open our eyes and unstop our ears to the truths that He has been whispering through time and forevermore.

You are a child...of God...claim it!

Look, I totally get that many of you will hear a couple of the words that I say and think to yourselves, 'and what does the guy up front know exactly?'

Look, if you are looking to me, you're not looking far enough. Look to God. Dig into his Word (heck, how about you start by opening it on a regular basis!). Abide with Him in prayer. Serve Him by loving others as He has called for us to do.

Said another way: do your own homework (after all: this is a sermon on being called a child. Homework seemed appropriate!).

You want a place to start?

Dig into the crucifixion and the resurrection (you know, that whole Easter thing). What you will find is that Jesus was a real person, that his message affected the people of his day (and it still does), that he was raised from the dead, and that his followers were empowered by a power that was beyond them (that would be the Holy Spirit).

What you will find, yes, are a whole lot of people who screw the message up.

So dig deeper. Sift through the sinfulness of man (the sinfulness that leads us to believe that we are beyond the label of 'children') and begin to find the kernels of God's presence that declare that He is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all...and that His love has welcomed us as sons and daughters...as His children.

Repent. Turn to God. And claim it: You are a child of God!

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Lord, we are Your children...and yet we struggle with that identity to the point that we bolt away from it bound and determined to show that we have made it to the big table. God, shake us, soothe us, empower us to embrace who You are making us to be, children who are able to simply understand that You are able to lead us through all of our days. Lord, let it be so. Amen.