

YOUR TRUE IDENTITY CAN BE QUESTIONED!

Today's Text: Jn 10: 19- 42

Extracts:

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. Then *the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."* Jesus answered them, *"I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. ... I and the Father are one."* Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, *"Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?"* The Jews answered Him, saying, *"For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God"* [Jn 10: 22-25, 30-33]

Each year, the winning team in any national sports championship gets the privilege to visit the White House to meet the President and his family. In American football, the Green Bay Packers of Green Bay, Wisconsin, were the 2011 Super Bowl Champions (Super Bowl XLV).¹ On Friday, 12 August 2011, the team visited President Obama and his family in Washington, DC. When White House security began to check the IDs of members of the visiting team, their linebacker, Desmond Bishop, discovered that he had apparently left his ID card behind on the team bus. Security refused to make any exception for him. So, he had to return to the bus and wait for his team mates there. On his twitter page and phone call to his family back home, Bishop said, "It was pretty disappointing. I think it was a historic time, something you can tell your kids or your grandkids one day. To have missed that opportunity, it definitely stung a little bit."

Desmond Bishop's true identity was not in doubt. That he did not carry his ID card did not mean that he was not Desmond Bishop. His team mates could easily have vouched for him to gain entry. Yet, his identity was questioned because the security people would not bend their rules for his sake. We can easily find ourselves in a similar situation. No matter who or what you are, people will still question your identity to the point of frustrating you. You are in good company! Two thousand years ago, some Jewish leaders questioned the identity of Jesus as the Christ. Why were they not swayed by the overwhelming evidence? Let us study how He handled the matter and learn a few principles for our own spiritual development.

¹ Story based on: "Bishop forgets ID, misses White House," <http://msn.foxsports.com/nfl/story/desmond-bishop-forgets-ID-misses-green-bay-packers-White-House-visit-081511> ; Mon., Aug. 16, 2011

1. Background: Christ's true ID

Almost everybody that I know has or carries an identity card (ID card for short). It may be a school ID card or a driver's permit or a national passport. In each case, the ID card shows your picture and personal data, such as date of birth, height, colour of hair and eyes or race/ethnic group, etc. Some ID cards may carry your thumb print and most, if not all, must carry your signature. But does such an ID card really summarize your true identity? Everything there amounts to self-praise and yet the word of God says, "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips" [**Prov. 27: 2**]. Through finger prints and national data banks, your ID card may reveal your criminal records, if any, but there is no record of what you are thinking of in your heart. Yet, "the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" [**1 Sam. 16: 7**]. Therefore, *you can only know your true ID through God's lenses*, not man's. *It follows that you can be condemned by others where God is happy with you*. That was the situation that Jesus faced in the Bible text for this week's study.

He had just discussed with the Jewish leaders His role as the good shepherd that was ready to lay down His life for His flock. At the end, there was a division among them. Some said that Jesus had a demon and was mad. Therefore, people should not listen to Him. Others questioned such a position on the grounds that a demon could not open the eyes of the blind. In that state of confusion, they surrounded Jesus and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? *If You are the Christ, tell us plainly*" [**Jn 10: 14-24**]. In other words, they were asking Jesus to reveal to them His true identity as the Christ of God, that is, the One sent by God to save the world from sin, the One prophesied by the prophets of old as Immanuel, God with us [**Is. 7: 14; Matt. 1: 23**]. Jesus did not whip out His ID card to convince them who He really is. Instead, He pointed to certain *facts* (what can be verified empirically) *and truths* (what are real but may not be provable) about Himself as follows:

a) *His works*

Jesus said to the skeptics surrounding Him, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me" [**Jn 10: 25**]. They had seen Jesus perform so many miracles. For example, once, while John the Baptist was in prison, he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Coming One or if they should look for another. Jesus replied, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: *the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them*" [**Matt. 11: 2-5**]. Therefore, there was enough empirical evidence to show the true ID of Jesus as the Christ [**Lk 4: 18-21**]. Instead of accepting that, the Jewish leaders claimed that He was using the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons [**Matt. 12: 24**]!

b) *His equality with God*

If they would not believe that His works came from God, the next claim of His true identity was even more controversial. He told His listeners, “I and My Father are one,” and “I am the Son of God.” They understood Him because they immediately accused Him of blasphemy because He, being a Man, has made Himself God [**Jn 10: 30-36**].

The doctrine of the *Trinity* is even hard for practising Christians to grasp, not to talk of skeptics. We can easily accept that Jesus was human in that He was born of a woman [**Matt. 1: 23-25**], grew up like every other child and was obedient to His earthly parents [**Lk 2: 40**]. He was tempted [**Matt. 4: 2**] and prayed to and worshipped God like us [**Jn 17**]. He was at times hungry and at other times tired like every other human being [**Lk 4: 2; Jn 4: 6**]. Finally, He died like every other human being [**Lk 23: 46**]. But we also know that He preexisted as the Word of God. All things were made through Him and without Him was nothing made. He was made flesh and dwelt among us [**Jn 1: 1-3, 14**].

Go back to the first chapter of the book of Genesis and see how easily Trinity can be explained. In the beginning, *God created* the heavens and the earth. The *Spirit of God* was said to be hovering over the face of the waters. Then *God said*, “Let there be light” and there was light [**Gen. 1: 1-3**]. The God that created is distinguished from the Spirit of God that was hovering over the waters and the God that spoke is the Word of God, which John’s gospel confirms is the God that became flesh and dwelt among us! So, later in that same chapter, the Word of God said, “*Let Us* make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” [**v.26**]. The use of “Us” suggests the triune nature of God, which Jesus revealed to His disciples as *the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* [**Matt. 28:19**]. We know that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are invisible. Therefore, we do not know their likeness. But God the Son came in human flesh like all of us. Therefore, the pre-incarnate Christ was the One who spoke during the creation of the world! In Jesus the Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily [**Col. 2: 9**]. Three Persons in one God can thus be seen as “*One times One times One equals One.*” A simple illustration is the Bible that you read each day. It is only one book but it has three dimensions: length, width and height. Every page you open contains all three dimensions!

The Jews did not believe the true ID of Jesus as the Son of God, sent by His Father to deliver us from eternal damnation [**Jn 3: 16-17**]. They instead called Him a blasphemer! They were not ready to accept any proof of His true identity. He challenged them, saying, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe

Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.” They sought again to seize Him but He escaped out of their hands [**Jn 10: 37-39**].

After that episode, Jesus went beyond the River Jordan, to the place where John the Baptist had lived and worked. Many people came to Him and said, “John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true.” So, many believed in Jesus there [**vv. 40-42**]. That is interesting. *Christ’s true identity was more easily acceptable to true believers than skeptics*. He did not need to explain Himself or enumerate His achievements to them. If John’s testimony of Him was true, that was enough. So, from the forgoing analysis, we learn that *your true identity is measured by the identity of true witnesses who can vouch for you*. Let us apply that to your situation.

2. Why your true ID can be questioned

At home or school, in our places of work or worship, people in high and low places carry impressive ID cards or résumés, all of which are based on self-assessment. Such IDs need not be in writing. It can show up in our words or deeds. However, we may not know what is true or false until there is a challenge. Certainly, you may not want to be put in a position where your true ID is being questioned. So, before bringing yourself into public scrutiny, use the following check list to know the kind of ID card that you are currently carrying:

a) *It may have been stolen!*

The ID that you may portray in public may have been stolen but you may have used it to obtain benefits and privileges to which you are not entitled. Such a thing is called identity theft which is very prevalent in today’s economy. For example, according to 2010 statistics, 1 in every 20 Americans risks being a victim of identity theft and it is getting worse.²

Jesus has warned us to beware of false prophets who come to us in sheep’s clothing [a stolen ID] but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. By their fruits [not their ID cards], you shall know them [**Matt. 7: 15-16**]. For example, Philip, one of the seven deacons appointed by the apostles, fled to Samaria, from persecution of the early Christians in Jerusalem. There was a certain man there called Simon who had practised sorcery in that city and astonished people with his great works that people, from the least to the greatest, gave heed to him and regarded him as “the great power of God.” Following Philip’s ministry, Simon became a believer. When Peter and John came to lay hands on the new converts and signs and wonders followed, Simon the former sorcerer gave money to Peter to also give him

² Identity Theft Statistics, 2010; <http://www.identitytheftlabs.com/identity-theft/identity-theft-statistics-2010/>; 18 Feb. 2010

the power to lay hands on others for wonders. Peter cursed him, saying, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money... Your heart is not right with God” [**Acts 8: 8-21**]. Simon the sorcerer was actually an identity thief, never a true believer!

Instead of using your political or material influence to obtain promotion to higher spiritual ranks in your church that you are neither called to nor prepared for, let God use you for His purpose. The least in the kingdom of heaven is still greater than John the Baptist [**Matt. 12: 11**].

b) *It may have expired!*

You may have been fire-brand and quite zealous for the Lord when you gave your life to Christ. However, along the way, you have backslidden. It may have been due to your reaction to the local politics in your place of worship where people that you had trusted so much disappointed you. You may have been re-conquered by the sins that you thought that you had overcome. Meanwhile, there are some people whose lives you have touched positively during the brief period you were in the Lord. They have run with that to win other souls for Christ. How do you think such people will feel when they touch base with you only to discover you are no longer what they had seen not quite long ago? Your true ID has expired!

Get on your knees quickly, confess your sins and reconnect your roots to your faith in Christ because God is faithful. If you confess your sins, He will do what He has promised. He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness [**1 Jn 1: 9**]. Peter denied Jesus thrice. He went out and cried bitterly and Jesus forgave him. To prove that to Peter, the risen Christ, through an angel sitting on the right side of the tomb, said to Mary Magdalene and her group, “Go, tell His disciples- and Peter- that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you” [**Mk 16: 5-7**]. Peter was one of His disciples. Mentioning his name specifically emboldened him to meet the Lord who had forgiven him and restored his true identity.

c) *It may be fake!*

There are some criminal syndicates that generate ID cards that can only be declared fake after close scrutiny. For example, many illegal aliens in America carry driver’s permits bearing their true information but they were not issued by the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) agencies of the states where they operate. With such fake documents, they enjoy (for a season) benefits due to legal residents. There is a spiritual equivalent of such a practice.

The signs and wonders may be there but they come from the spirit of divination, not inspiration [Acts 16: 16]. For example, during the temptation of Jesus, Satan took Him up on a high mountain, “showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time” and said to Jesus, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be yours” [Lk 4: 5-7]. “In a moment of time” suggests it was a vision that the devil showed Jesus! Can you imagine what he can do to mere mortals like us? But the authority that Satan claimed to have was false because the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof [Ps. 24: 1]. Satan was posing as an angel of light that he was not and so do his messengers [2 Cor. 11: 13-15]. So, if you do not know who is offering you something that is valuable to you, run!

From the forgoing, we can draw the following conclusions: if your ID was stolen or falsely acquired or granted you by an unauthorized person, God will question it, even if the world praises you. But if it is genuine, God will commend you even when the world condemns you. The latter case is envy at work! Take solace in the words of Jesus where He said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.” But He added, “He who hates Me hates My Father also” [Jn 15: 18, 23]. By extension, **whoever hates you for your true identity anchored on Christ Jesus does not only hate you but Jesus that you have believed and God the Father who has sent Him.**

3. Conclusion: Therefore, always carry Christ’s ID card!

If you are in Christ, you are a new creation; your old self of sin gives way to a new life of fear of the Lord and total obedience to His will [2 Cor. 5: 17]. For example, Barnabas, formerly called Joses, was a rich Levite from Cyprus. After giving his life to Christ, he sold his land and laid the money at the feet of the apostles [Acts 4: 36-37]. After Saul had converted on the road to Damascus from a persecutor of believers to a follower of Christ, it was Barnabas that introduced him (now known as Paul) to the apostles in Jerusalem [Acts 9: 27]. As the church grew in Antioch, Barnabas, now recognized by all as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” was the one who went to Tarsus to bring Paul to Antioch where they worked together for a whole year. Interestingly, it was in that church that the disciples were first called Christians [Acts 11: 19-26]. Do you need to ask for their ID cards? They were carrying Christ’s ID card. You can see why they suffered so much in the hands of Jewish and Roman authorities.

Go and be likewise.