

HIDDEN WORTH

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (I John 3:1).

The Apostle was writing to people like us who were caught up in a world where human life was cheap and people easily got the idea that they were not worth very much.

In John's day, millions of people were slaves who actually did not count for much. Someone else made all the decisions for them, told them where to live, how to raise their children, and what the whole family was to do from morning to night. Today many things are different. Taking pride in their freedom, people all over the world, including the wealthiest and the most powerful, are oppressed by a sense of worthlessness. Unrelieved by any assurance from on high, like the one John gave to those early Christians, the deep depression brought on by the feeling that he doesn't count can sour a man's whole life and sometimes cause him to do things which make you wonder whether or not he is in his right mind.

The kind of lives we live in the twentieth century has not helped things very much. Indeed, it has often made things much worse. Modern man has been subjected to a process of scrutiny of his emotions, analysis of his personality, and dissection of his character which often makes him feel a little bit more like an animal than a human being created by God a little lower than the angels.

If you have ever had a thorough physical examination, you know what I am talking about. A nurse comes in at five o'clock in the morning to give you a grayish, tasteless liquid called barium so that it will show up on X-rays. Then you sit outside the X-ray room in a bathrobe with a long line of other people, carrying a card with a number, waiting your turn.

There is nothing like a thorough physical examination to make a person feel like something instead of someone. When the same sort of thing is done to determine how a man thinks and what lies behind his deepest emotions, is it any wonder that he begins to think of himself as a worthless something instead of someone who counts?

To counteract the feeling that they are not worth very much, people are urged to think of themselves today in modern secular society as individuals. A man is told that the reward for doing the right thing at the right time goes to him alone. Even though much emphasis is placed on team effort, he must climb the ladder of success alone. Any method used to get to the top is satisfactory, whether it is conniving, cheating, lying, or even hard work, according to the thinking of many people. The point is: a man has got to get with it and stay with it alone.

At the same time, the idea of togetherness is promoted by the secular practitioners to overcome the bad effects of excessive individualism, where a man feels that he is all alone in the world, needs no one else and cannot depend on anyone else, and often coming to think of himself as a minor god who can do what he pleases regardless of anyone else. The solution proposed for that problem is that everyone should think of himself as a member of the team, conforming with the ideas of the group so that he may be able to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number. Man is not to be an individual at all, but one of many -- dispensable, replaceable, disposable if he does not shape up to group standards. If he gets out of line, someone tells him, "How often do we have to tell you, don't rock the boat!"

Caught in these conflicting pressures, trapped in the pincers between the ceaseless struggle to be himself and the constant fear that he will not conform, many a man hides his real thoughts, engages only in superficial relationships, represses any creative urge he might have, and throws himself with all his might into the dull routine most people call life. If you keep busy, he tells himself, you forget.

The drive to keep busy makes modern man a sucker for the myraid of overly busy committees, activities, and parties that characterize life in our modern, industrial, and urbanized way of life.

It is a significant fact that larger numbers of people than ever before are seeking a way out through excessive use of depressants, like alcohol and narcotics. Here the individual thinks he can forget through momentary pleasure the pervading sense of worthlessness that runs through his whole being. For one brief and shining hour he can be as a king, he thinks. The only trouble is that he is building a crutch which will eventually crumble under him, causing him to fall and break his leg or maybe even his neck.

Still others seek a way out through stimulation. The Playboy philosophy in modern society, which does not have any use for God or even for love, encourages people to set themselves up as arbiters of morals and to decide for themselves what is right and good for a man. The Playboy people tell us that unmarried sex is one of the finest, cleanest, and best parts of life -- as long as it is by mutual desire and consent and nobody gets hurt. In the process, as one writer has pointed out, woman becomes simply another aspect of the status-symbol mania of modern society. "She is no more or less important than the sleekest sports car or most expensive bottle of Scotch. A woman becomes simply an object for man's pleasure, something to pour his drinks, inflate his ego, and look gorgeous on his arms as he parades in front of his pals," just an accessory which a man uses and discards along with his empty liquor bottles, cigarette packs, and old clothes.

This is worthlessness at its peak. This is worthlessness at work. It makes a man or woman feel small, insignificant, and worthless in a massively hostile society which promises people all kinds of illusory values, but actually gives them loneliness, frustration, and a feeling that they don't count for anything at all.

Modern man, after all his progress in science and technology, feels alone in the crowd. No one really knows him or cares about him except in the most superficial way. We do not have any time to listen to each other because we would rather talk about ourselves. We listen to someone else only to earn the right to speak ourselves. We do not have any intention of speaking our true thoughts because they might militate against the party line. Therefore, we do not enter into deep relationships with anyone for fear that if we really knew what they thought they would use it against us. We are afraid to speak the truth for fear it will be misunderstood, and we are afraid to love for fear of exposing ourselves to rejection.

To people like us John said, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

This passage of Scripture tells us that in the heart and mind of God a man is somebody and counts for something. He counts enough to be redeemed by the blood of God's Son. He counts enough to be restored and received by the power of Christ, Who is both the author and goal of faith. In God's mind, you are not a faceless cipher. You count. God wants you to belong to Him by faith in Jesus Christ, and to count for something while you remain in this world. He wants you to be someone, His own son or daughter, destined for great things just because you belong to Him.

You may have forgotten how to love, but God has not forgotten. In spite of everything, God still loves. God loves you. He is not appalled by your sense of worthlessness. Rather, He is ready to take advantage of it. He knows how you feel. That is why He sent His Son to be a man like you, except without any sin. That is why His Son died that your death might not be a meaningless, worthless thing. That is why His Son was raised from the grave, that you might have life through Him in all of its rich abundance.

Christ died for you. Christ Himself drove the final nail into the coffin of human worthlessness. Since Christ died for you, you cannot be worthless. Since Christ died for you, whatever separates you from God has been forgiven. Since Christ died for you, the vacuum in your life can be filled with the love of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God."

The death of Christ was not just an accident in history. He died for a purpose. He bore in His own body our sins upon His cross that we might make a clean break with that meaningless and worthless life of sins and henceforth live unto Him in righteousness. This is the way that God planned things, and this is the way He wants it to be with you. Why condemn yourself to worthlessness when God has put the ultimate stamp of worth upon your life -- His love in Christ Jesus?

Don't write yourself off as being worthless when the Son of God gave His life for you. See yourself as you are, someone for whom God cares, someone whom God freely forgives, someone whom God invites to become a member of His family where everyone counts. Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that through faith in Christ we are privileged to sit around the family circle with Him as our loving Father and ourselves His beloved sons and daughters.

This is a personal relationship. God loves you personally. It does not matter or make any difference who you are or what you have done. The sooner that we get rid of the thought that God loves us because we are worth loving, because we are such wonderful people, or because somehow we are better than others -- the sooner we get rid of that, the sooner we will realize what it means when it is said that God loves us. God loves you in spite of yourself. Though you have turned away from Him and gone your own way, He still loves you. For people like us Christ died. People like you and me are invited to become children of God through faith in Christ and to be someone, not because of ourselves, but because of Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Be someone who counts in God's family, and you will be someone who counts in this world of ours. This is not a promise that you will suddenly get wealthy, find a better job, or solve your family problems overnight. It is a promise that God will be a Father to you because He has a personal relationship to you in Jesus Christ. Once

you are in that relationship by faith in Christ, everything will look different. Things will change, problems will be solved, and you will go on from strength to strength. You will be someone who is worthwhile instead of worthless.

A man is not worth very much who does not worship God. Being someone in the eyes of God, with genuine worth through faith in Christ, makes a man feel that it is right and good to worship God with real reverence and with genuine love. God loves you. How can you respond to Him except with love? "See what love the Father hath given us that we should be called children of God."

Psychologists have tried to make it clear to us that unless a child is loved, his chances are not very promising of developing later on in life deep and mutually satisfying relationships. God knows us and loves us. He loved us from the beginning and He will love us at the end. In the love of God, be the person God wants you to be, His own son or daughter capable of showing love in return.

Love works both ways. The love of God is the love of a father to his children. When children love their father, they also love each other. You can do for others what is done for you. You will do that if you are someone in God's family, knowing that you count in the eyes of your Father because you belong to Him by faith in Jesus Christ.

God expresses His love to the world through His children. The sons and daughters of God feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and those in prison, all the time acting naturally as sons and daughters who count in the eyes of their Father.

This relationship of children of God does not arouse universal admiration in the world. Sometimes we arouse the contempt of the world when we do not live up to the great name of sons and daughters of God. At other times, when God's sons and daughters act as they are supposed to act, they earn only hostility and misunderstanding. Nevertheless, with all our limitations and weaknesses, we who live by faith in Jesus Christ are called upon to show love to those who are round about us. They are to be invited by us to become members of God's family, by faith in the atoning death of Christ, accepting the forgiveness of their sins and following Him where He leads. We know what it is to be someone because we know Jesus Christ, and we must act the part of God's children.

Christ gave His life for you who are yet unsaved as much as He did for anyone. He wants you as much as anyone to trust Him as Saviour. Put your confidence and faith in Christ and you will find Him to be your Saviour, too. He will cleanse your life of past misdeeds, will restore you to your rightful place as a member of God's family, and will renew your whole being. That is really something -- to be someone in God's family through Jesus Christ. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God."