

# We are children of God

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] If you're using a church Bible, we're going to read chapter 2 verse 28 to chapter 3 verse 3. So we're carrying on thinking about Christian identity and what is true of us if we have faith in the Lord Jesus. And here once again we're going to focus on this reality that as Christians we are children of God. So let's hear God's Word again. 1 John 2 and at verse 28, And now, dear children, continue in Him, in Jesus, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him. See what great love the Father has lavished on 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. Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see

Him as He is. All who have this hope in Him purify themselves just as He is pure. So that's our text for this evening. We are children of God. Let's begin by thinking about family values for a moment or two.

So in the October holidays, we did a house swap with a family that we'd never met before. But within probably five minutes, we had a pretty good picture of some of the things that they valued most.

There was train memorabilia everywhere. Very important. Open a cupboard. And there was a whole array of wonderful teas for us to choose from. There were family photos everywhere. And there were little inscriptions and Bible verses everywhere. Didn't know them, but within a few minutes we got a sense of what they valued. Every family, I think, will have a set of shared values. Sometimes those are written down. You know, in this house we do. You've maybe seen those. Often they are unwritten. But those values that we share serve to shape us and the way that we operate as a family.

Now the story is told of the Apostle John who wrote this letter when he was a very old man, unable really to walk by himself, that he would be carried on some form of a stretcher between house churches where he lived. And the only sermon he was able to deliver, maybe the only sermon he wanted to deliver was, little children love one another. Because he understood very well that in God's family we are to value love. That love is the dominant family value. So if you were to read this letter, let me encourage you to read this letter later, you'll see the dominant theme that comes again and again is love. There is a lot about ethics. How should the family of God live? And again, those ethics center on the significance of love. So Christians come to experience God's love in the gospel. And we discover this wonderful truth that God loved us so much that he sent his son Jesus to die in our place for our sin, to forgive us, and to bring us into his family. Christians then profess their love for God, and for Jesus his son, that we seek to live that out in the way that we live. We express that love in the way that we treat one another, and in the way we seek to show obedience to God and his words.

[ 4 : 0 2 ] And you'll find that in this letter. But our focus is really a return to where Bob had us in week one, but maybe with a slight twist. In week one, if you were here in Christian Identity, we thought personally, I am a child of God. That's a wonderful, significant truth. Now we're going to think about it from a corporate point of view, that we are children of God, because that's the emphasis as it falls here in John's letter. So the first thing for us to recognize, and it's right in the center of our text, is that children of God are loved by God, that we who know and love Jesus, we are loved by God. It's there in chapter 3 and verse 1. Let me read that again.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. So right at the center of this section, right at the center of our faith, right at the center of the life of the people of God, is this truth that God graciously chooses to pour His love on

rebel sinners, transforming us into children of God?

If we were reading this from the King James Version, we would hear familiar words from many, behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us. And that's actually helpful here.

The question, you know, what manner of love is this? The idea that this is a love that is foreign, this is not a love that we typically are going to see around us. It comes from somewhere different.

So when we go on a foreign holiday, we see new things. Things are different. Sometimes they stop us in our tracks and they make us go, wow. John is reminding us that God's love is out of this world.

[ 5 : 53 ] There is nothing like it, nothing compares to it. And that love is intended to stop us in our tracks, so that we would behold, so that we would contemplate. John understands that God's love is so powerful and so beautiful, it is a masterpiece worth gazing on, not just something we glance at and walk on by. And so the Apostle John wants God's children to be amazed over and over by the love of God. A couple of particular aspects to draw our attention to when we think about God's love here.

Let's think about the truth that God's love is a gracious love. Okay, so John, who wrote this letter, also wrote the Gospel of John. And in John chapter 1, verse 12 and 13, we're reminded that to all who did receive Jesus, many people reject Jesus, but to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, children born of God, or those familiar words from John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. What does that reveal to us about God and His love?

Those verses remind us that it's God who acts. It's God who takes the initiative. It's God who gives His Son to be the Savior the world needs. It's God who gives the gift of faith to His people that they might believe. It is God through His Son who gives eternal life. It is God who gives this new status that the people who believe in Jesus are adopted children of God. It's not just in His Gospel, it's here in His letter also. If we were in chapter 4 of 1 John in verse 10, we read there, this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. That language of atoning sacrifice is the idea of propitiation, a very big word, the idea being that we are by nature and by choice rebels and enemies against our God.

We are guilty sinners who break God's law, and the God who is holy and who is righteous is righteously angry at our sin. And the truth from God's Word is that the punishment that should fall from God should fall on us as lawbreakers. But by God's grace, there is a sacrifice provided so that God's holy anger, instead of falling on the people who deserve it, it falls somewhere else.

There is a diversion that takes place. When traffic is diverted, you expect to go on this route, but it takes another route. God's just anger is diverted so it doesn't fall on us, it falls instead on Jesus, His Son, who is graciously provided as that sacrifice that deals with the holy anger of God.

[ 9 : 18 ] So that God's justice is satisfied, and at the same time, His gracious love and mercy is put on display, that through the death of Jesus, peace is established through faith. And sinful people can become children of God, because we deserve it, but because of God's grace and His having provided His Son, Jesus.

This letter puts it another way, 1 John 3 verse 16. This is how we know what love is. Lots of people have different ideas about love. Here's how John defines it for us biblically.

This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. The love that comes from God is gracious and sacrificial. It involves the perfect holy Son of God bearing our sin, facing the wrath of God. Such is His love. And it's that act, and the results that flow from that act that make us children of God. So it's no wonder then that John invites us to stop and to admire and to say, see, behold, what great love. We were down in Bristol, the Bristol area for our house swap. And when you go down to Bristol, many people will visit this bridge that's on our screen, Brunel's famous Clifton suspension bridge. You can pay money. There's a visitor center. You can walk across it. You can drive across it. It is an architectural wonder. There is a far greater wonder here in 1 John chapter 3 verse 1. It's the wonder of the gospel. You know, look at that bridge and you recognize there's a gulf that's being bridged. In the gospel, we discover there is a huge gulf, a huge gap that exists between a perfectly holy God and us as sinful people. And yet the God of grace has bridged that gap through the cross of the Lord Jesus. And as we understand the gospel, we're led to recognize that we do admire the gospel. We admire the love of God, but we don't stop there. We need to, as it were, walk across so that we might receive, so that we might enjoy, that we might enter into the joy of being children of God because of God's gracious love. And so John wants us to

stop and to admire and to reflect and to consider God's grace, but also to recognize that God's love has a transforming effect. To go back to verse 1, he says, see what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. And there's this wonderful reality built into this verse that says to us, we are children of God by fact and not by feeling. God's love does something, brings a definite change, makes us children of God, gives us this new identity. That God's love transforms our legal status before God is changed. Our passport is now changed, so it reads we are citizens of heaven.

Now we function differently in this world because we have a new identity. We become a pilgrim people. We become exiles. This world is not our true home. Verse 1 continues, the reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Jesus came into this world that he made. He came to his own people, but his own people didn't receive him, didn't recognize him. And in a similar way, as the people of God, as we're given this new identity, we become distinctly different. We're a set-apart people.

We're a holy people. We're in the world, but not of the world. And as we thought about this morning, sometimes that will lead to opposition and difficulty because of this new identity that we have. So we have this Christian privilege that God has loved us, that he has changed us, that he's put his name on us, and he's given us this identity that is fixed and permanent. And through knowing the Lord Jesus Christ, we have this invitation to enjoy, not just to watch, but to enjoy the out-of-this-world love of God as we trust in Jesus and what he did on the cross. And what becomes clear in John's thinking is it's God's love for his people that is the foundation of our shared faith. It's this reality that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, eternally known and loved and chosen and saved. And we share this joy, this joy of God lavishing his love on us. You hear that word lavish under what you think of.

[14:38] Perhaps like me, you think of a great meal, a great feast. The Christian family are invited to feast together on God's amazing grace and love shown towards us in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the foundation of our faith, and it's also the foundation of our shared fellowship. We should be called children of God. That is what we are. This isn't just a personal, a private thing. It's a corporate thing. Again, it's a reminder that the church isn't built like every other social club. It doesn't come into existence because we share a certain culture. Rather, it's built on this spiritual fellowship.

It's built on the reality of union with Christ, shared communion with the Lord Jesus. I wonder as we look around a church gathering like this, how do we see one another? What do we see as we look around? And what John would have us to do is he would have us to put on gospel glasses to see one another as we are in Christ, to understand that we are children of God, loved by God. So that's the first thing. Children of God are loved by God. The second thing, and this is so important for our identity also, is that the children of God share a glorious future hope. Again, got me thinking about family life. Family life often brings with it that sense of happy anticipation. You know, we think about whether it's from your childhood or just now. Often, our families, we're looking forward. Maybe we're looking forward to the next holiday, or the next time we can gather together all in one place. Maybe it's just looking forward to having time to share a meal together. But there's always a sense of anticipation. It's always been true of families. There are hard times, but there are good times that we anticipate. And the same is wonderfully true in the family of God.

And John wants to remind us of this future happy anticipation as a truth that would be so amazing to us that it would keep us persevering in following Jesus. And it would create a longing for what is still to come. So John's writing to a group of people, and some of their leaders have left. They've decided to stop following Jesus. And they're preaching another message. And the church has been rattled by that and shaken by that. And so John wants to reassure them in the present, you're loved by God, but to give them this great future hope as well. Two aspects that we can draw to our attention. In verse 28, here's one aspect of this glorious hope, that for those who are trusting in Jesus, we can have confidence at Christ's coming. And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears, we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.

[17:58] You'll maybe notice there's four C's in there. I have four different words we can see. That's quite helpful for us. So notice that this is addressed to dear children. So he's going to talk about hope, but this is a specific hope. This isn't just a general hope. This is a hope for those who belong to God, those who are trusting in Jesus, who become children of God, and what does He say to those children? He says, continue in Him. John loves that language of continue in Him, abide

in Him, remain in Him. We heard it, didn't we, in John chapter 15.

I am the vine, you are the branches. And the church then, as Jesus was speaking, were invited to remain in Christ. Our faith must be rooted and established in Christ. We must remain in Christ's words, trusting and obeying the truth of God's Word, the truth of the gospel. And so we must continue in our union with Christ, remain in Him as we look to enjoy this hope.

John also reminds them that there is a definite point in view, so that when He appears, is mentioned, and it says, we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming. So there's this reality that Jesus will appear one day. He came once in humility, born in a stable. He will come again in glory, and everybody will see Him, and everybody will stand before Him on the judgment day. And that's what's in view in verse 28, and there's two different responses on that day. And so even as we think about the confidence that we can have as Christians, there's a reminder of the importance of being right with Jesus today. If we want to have confidence for our future, if we want to meet Jesus with confidence rather than shrinking back in shame because of unbelief, we need to put our trust in Jesus today, that His coming would be joy for us and not shame. But Jesus is writing to dear children. He's writing to believers. And so He's saying that coming of Christ, which could bring fear if you didn't have faith, will lead you to be confident because you do trust in Christ. He wants to reassure believers. If you know, if you're living in God's love for us in Christ, if you love Him, you can have bold confidence to meet Him. That the return of Jesus will be like the joy of homecoming, as we're welcomed into our eternal home for all eternity. So there's that great hope and confidence that we can have at Christ's coming. And connected to that in chapter 3 and verse 2, there is this great hope that when Christ appears, we will be conformed to Christ's image. A fancy way of saying we shall be made like Him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be is not yet been made known, but we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Just to think more broadly about this letter, John, in his Gospel and in this letter, he loves opposites. So he'll speak about light, and he'll speak about dark, and he'll speak about love, and he'll speak about hate. And as we hear these statements, sometimes as Christians, it makes us very aware of our own feelings. So for example, in chapter 1 and verse 6, we hear this, if we claim to have fellowship with Him, and yet walk in the darkness, we lie. But the reality is, even as Christians, all too often we find ourselves choosing the darkness of sin. We know we belong to Him, but still often we make wrong choices and we choose darkness instead of light. Chapter 3, verse 11, this is the message you heard from the beginning, we should love one another. It's really clear how we should treat one another, but too often instead of showing love, we'll find ourselves grumbling, perhaps we'll find ourselves gossiping, perhaps even we'll find ourselves hating others whom God loves and whom Jesus died for. And that's simply to say that there is this tension that exists within us, that we can at one and the same time know that we are God's children and be aware that we are at the same time works in progress. That we have been made in the image of God, but that image has been defaced by sin. Remember we thought about that? God is at work in restoring and renovating, but that work is not complete. And so often we feel that tension in the way that we live.

[ 23 : 14 ] But here's the great hope that is a day coming when Christ appears, when that renovating work of the Holy Spirit will be complete. Again, to go back a couple of weeks, remember we used this illustration, the Just Stop Oil protesters throwing soup on Van Gogh's masterpiece, The Sunflowers. We saw the masterpiece that was spoiled and that was damaged, but that masterpiece was then restored by the experts and returned to its original glory. And that's a helpful picture of the work that God does in each of us. And on that day, the day when Christ appears, that's the day John gives us hope that when our trust is in Jesus, we will be conformed. We will be made like the risen Christ. The image of God will be perfectly restored. Notice that John says there's an element of mystery about what's still to come for the people of God. What we will be has not yet been made known. There are things that are simply too much for us to take in, too wonderful for us to be able to grasp, but here are things we do know.

We know, end of verse 2, that when Christ appears, so His appearing is definite, we shall be like Him and we shall see Him as He is.

We shall be like Him as He is. What amazing love that would work in us to the extent that there is a day coming when you and I, if our faith is in Jesus, will be morally perfect. When we will be unable to sin. When we will be perfected in our love towards God and towards one another. There is a day

coming for the Christian when we will be as beautiful in character as the Jesus we meet in the Gospels. That's a loving transformation.

That should make us stop and behold and worship. Back to family anticipation. You can probably think about this. Think about a family gathering that you've really looked forward to.

Think about a holiday that you've really anticipated. The reality that often is met is that something or someone can spoil it. It could be something as simple as traffic. It could be something as simple as an argument over a board game. It could be a discussion that turns in a really negative way. Often we find that that great expectation is then tainted because of something that happens because we are not perfect. And here's why I bring that up. When we hear the reality, you and I will spend eternity together. For John that's intended to make us worship with joy, it might make us groan on the inside. It might even make us fearful. Because sometimes we really struggle with one another in the Christian family. It can be hard living life together because we are saints and we are sinners. And what John would say to us again is that we need to learn to see ourselves and our future differently and see one another differently. We again need to put on those gospel glasses because heaven is going to be different. The new creation is going to be different. Why? Because it's a world of perfect love. It's a world where there is no sin. So we will positively cross the room to greet one another rather than cross the room to avoid one another as we might find ourselves doing sometimes.

[ 27 : 16 ] And at the centre of our joy, at the centre of our glorious future, we see Jesus. We get to worship our glorious, loving Saviour. And that is something worth thinking about and that is something worth talking about because this is a shared future hope. Think about it in our families. You've got a holiday to look forward to. Typically you're going to be talking about it as you get ready, as you're waiting.

We should be talking together about this wonderful future that we have together. So I remember when I was eight, nine, ten, there was an old lady in our church called Morang Makai. I remember two things about Morang Makai. One, she made the best double-decker pancakes on the planet. But she also spoke to us eight, nine, ten-year-olds often encouraging us to think about the fact that Jesus was coming again.

At that point, I wasn't even a Christian, but I got that sense that she was wonderfully excited about this shared hope for all the people of God. I still remember the pancakes, but I remember that hope. It seemed so surprising and so wonderful and so fresh in her imagination. May that be true for all of us as we understand this hope that's for us, but it's a hope that we share.

One last thing to recognize in this text that's really brief. The children of God, we share his family values. John's logic as he talks to the church of the Lord Jesus. He says, this is who you are, your children of God.

[ 29 : 01 ] He says, this is your glorious future. But then he takes it one step further. He says, so here is how you and I should live today. God's family is to look and to feel a certain way.

God's family is to look and to see, this is what the family of God values. Just as it didn't take me too long with a house swap to understand, this is some of what this family values. It should be apparent what the family of God values. And also just as children take on the likeness of a parent or parents, there is this reality that John points to, that children loved by God, children who are saved by grace, children who are filled with the Spirit, we will more and more take on the likeness of our Father and of Jesus our elder brother. So look at chapter 2 in verse 29. This is in reference to Jesus. If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. So there is Jesus who lived in perfect righteousness, the Son of God who always lived in line with God's standards, lived in perfect obedience, lived with perfect love. And one of the tests to show here as a child of God is that we are practicing righteousness by the grace of God, with the help of the Spirit, seeking to be more and more like our elder brother. Righteous because he is righteous. And then verse 3, notice the connection, all who have this hope, this hope at Christ's appearing, all who have this hope in him, purify themselves just as he is pure. So the idea that we find in the Old Testament of purity, of being ceremonially pure and clean and fit for God's presence, Jesus is the perfectly pure one, utterly blameless and spotless, morally, spiritually perfect. But there is this wonderful truth that God that God is making his children pure, that we are called to participate again with the help of the Spirit in seeking to purify ourselves and seeking to put off the old and to put on the new. And we do that of course with a wonderful promise that we will be like Jesus one day, that one day we too will be pure and righteous when we are with Jesus, made like Jesus. In John 15,

John spoke about those who abide in

Christ, those who remain in Christ, those who remain in Christ, will bear fruit. You can think about bearing the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5, 22 and 23. As the Spirit is at work in us, making us more like Jesus, we will be displaying this love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness, and goodness, and faithfulness, and gentleness, and self-control. That's a perfect description of Jesus, perfect character.

[ 32 : 35 ] That's what God is looking to establish in his believing people. We're not made perfect yet, but we're called to pursue righteousness and purity, knowing that one day we will be. We aim for holiness today because we know that that's what eternity is going to be like. We will be righteous and pure in heaven and in the new heavens and the new earth. We want to avoid culture shock. We want to live as closely to that reality as we can today. Because we are deeply loved children of God, God. And because we share this glorious hope, together we want to bear this family likeness in our church for his glory and for the sake of his kingdom. Let's pray about that together.