

1 John 2:28-3:10

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Let's pray as we stand. And now, our Heavenly Father, as you speak to us, we pray that you would shepherd us into green pastures besides still waters, that you would make our souls lie down so that we might feast on you and all that you have for us.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if you would turn to 1 John chapter 3, Josh just read for us a moment ago, 2 and 3, on page 1022.

I just want to say, I know this was advertised as a farewell sermon. It's not really. I'm just, sorry, you can leave now. I'm just preaching the next passage in our Bible series, and I think it was chosen three years ago.

So, that's what I do. You don't want to hear my best thoughts for the day. We want to hear the voice of God and what God is saying to us. So, our practice at St. John's is week by week to move through books of the Bible.

And the great advantage of that is it delivers you as a congregation from my hobby horses, thankfully. And it drives the preacher to find the treasure in the text.

[1 : 24] This, for me, has been one of the highest privileges of being your pastor for 33 years, and one of the most difficult pieces of work. And what a treasure we have this morning.

I've worked on it this week. It has simply taken my breath away. It's put everything in perspective. It's taken me back to that first love of childhood wonder at the Lord who loves us so much, who has adopted us into his family, calling us his sons and daughters, by whom we call him our Father.

And chapter 3, verses 1 to 3, is the peak and pinnacle of 1 John. Everything leads up to it. Everything flows from it.

And it's the pinnacle and peak of the Christian faith and of the Bible revelation. Tells us who God is. Tells us who we are. Gives us the key to transformation in life now.

Speaks about our eternal hope. It is simply a wow passage. And who knew three years ago this would be the last passage that I was preaching to you.

[2 : 40] So look at 3.1. See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God, and so we are. Dr. J.I. Packer of beloved memory, in his most famous book, *Knowing God*, has a whole very long chapter on this thing, on the fact that God has adopted us as his children.

And he calls it the highest privilege the gospel offers us. It's higher than forgiveness. It's higher than justification, by which God in his grace sweeps away all that stands between us, our sin, our guilt, all that stands between God and us.

But this is different. This is God drawing us into the intimacy of his own family. It's not just sins and guilt forgiven.

It's more. It's the relation of deepest possible connection and eternal belonging, which begins now in this life and continues after we die.

And it is the source of all true transformation in this life of how we become like Christ. Adoption is a family idea, and at the heart of adoption is love, love.

[4 : 05] Free, undeserved, the lavish love of God. And here's the thing. God did not need to adopt any of us. He could have forgiven us. He could have even saved us from sin and made us members of his kingdom.

He could have even given us an eternal future without the privilege of being made his children and knowing Jesus as his brother. This is the highest blessing of the gospel.

And he takes sinful, human, rebellious, self-focused men and women, and he deals with all that stands between us. And then, unlike human adoptions, as he takes us into his family, he places his own spiritual DNA in us so that we gradually become like Jesus.

His seed abides in us, as it says later in the passage. And he gives us full rights as sons and daughters. Isn't that amazing? And at the heart of God's relationship with us are not rules and regulations and rubrics, but closeness, affection, and love, which is just fantastic news.

Because despite our wobbly faith and our constant failing, we are eternally included and eternally loved, radically included in his family.

[5 : 31] We belong to a new humanity and where we begin to reflect the family likeness and grow nearer and dearer to him day by day. Verse 1, see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God, and so we are.

And I hate to tell you this, but it's another lame translation of the original. The word see, and the old version was behold, is not, it's a command, it's not, have you seen the weather today?

I mean, it's just, it's not a passing observation. It is a cry of astonishment and childlike amazement. John is saying, feast your eyes on this.

Fill your heart with this. Have you ever seen anything like this? Last weekend, Bronnie and I were at the All In on Anvil Island.

And on the way home in Sydney and Ewan's boat, we saw a group of whales, you know, a kilometre away. And suddenly a young whale, and I had my iPhone and I just had the record button on, suddenly a young whale came so close to the boat, I could have touched it right there.

[6 : 48] And then it came through to the surface a few yards away. We did not say to each other, see what kind of whale just swam by the ship. In fact, I played the video over last night to hear our exclamations, and they were, oh my, oh my goodness.

That's what the love of God deserves. When he says, look at what kind of love, what kind of is exactly the same word the disciples used when Jesus stood up in the storm on the lake and stilled the waters and stilled the wind and saved them from sure death.

And in the English it says, who is this guy? Who is he? It's literally, where does he come from? This sort of power is completely foreign and alien to human experience, and so is the love of God.

And this is a command from John for us to ponder, to savour, to meditate on how good God's love for us is for us. It's so radically different than anything we've ever experienced.

I think that's why it's so hard for us to accept. And it is hard to accept. It's hard to believe. We keep wanting to do something to show that we're worthy.

[8 : 12] We're like the prodigal son. Remember, when he returned to the father, he didn't really believe the father loved him. He decided he'd go and do a deal with the father. Father, take me back and I'll work as a slave.

I'll work off the debt. It's easy for us to think badly of God in this same way, that he doesn't really love us, that he can't be trusted to do us good.

It's the point of 3.1. It's the shocking quality of God's love to adopt us. And in the ancient world in these days, when a couple adopted someone, they might be getting on in years and they didn't have any children.

They would look around and test various applicants for adoption until they found someone completely worthy to carry on their family name. And then they would sign the deed and hand on the rights to them.

It's not God. God adopts us purely out of his love. Not because we're worthy, but despite our terrible track record. And his love for us doesn't stop after the initial adoption.

[9 : 20] Because God, it's amazing, he sets himself to constantly win our affections ongoingly, showing us more and more love daily. Hasn't he done that for us as a church community?

I mean, in his constancy and his goodness, he has shown day by day, week by week. And even the fact that we are here now is testimony to his love.

And John, in this verse 1, he's calling us to widen our hearts to the love of God. And then he moves into the passage with two points. He wants to show us how the love of God energizes us to long for the future and energizes us to live in the present.

These are my two points now. Number one, the love of God energizes us to long for the future. The ancient church father Augustine said that the whole life of the Christian is a holy longing.

That through longing, God stretches our souls and makes room in them for more love. So he says to the congregation preaching on this passage, pour out the vinegar and the evil from your hearts.

[10 : 38] Make room for the honey and the gold. Verse 2. Beloved, we are God's children now. What we will be has not yet appeared.

But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him. For we shall see him as he is. John is telling us to fill our hearts with so much more that is to come.

That there is an order in the Christian life. We are now God's children. There is a not yet, has not yet appeared what we will be. But when he appears, which means he's already there full of glory.

On that last day when his glory will appear. For all who are God's children now, our faith will be turned into sight and we will become like him because we will see him face to face as he is.

When he comes again, brothers and sisters, he will change our mortal bodies to be like his glorious body. No more decay. No more disease.

[11 : 45] No more death. But when we see him face to face, the spiritual DNA that God has planted in us will rise up. And he will through that remove all sin and impurity, all the residual selfishness and self-justifications that we have.

All the darkness and dysfunction and damage. And we will perfectly reflect the character of Jesus Christ forever. Each of us individually in our own way and corporately together.

That day will be like a family reunion of all family reunions. Some family reunions you don't want to go to. This one you do. When the Lord Jesus returns with his saints, we are told he will be glorified in his saints.

And he will stand on that day saying in our hearing, here are my brothers and sisters who have endured. Here are the children God the Father has given me and I love you.

And John has already said the world is passing away. And if you look back in our passage at 2.28, he says, And now, little children, abide in him now. Abide in him.

[12 : 57] So that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink back in shame at his coming. I've always thought this verse felt a bit like pulling our socks up.

That's not what it's about at all. I mean, you know, Jesus is coming. Look busy. Do a lot of good Christian things. Don't be naughty. Watch out. That's almost the opposite of what this is saying.

The word confidence is literally all speech. It is the picture of intimate friends who around the campfire are able to bear their souls and their hearts to each other.

You've got friends who you're unafraid to speak to without filters, with honesty, knowing that you're accepted and loved and they do too. That's what the word means.

And as we abide in Jesus, his future coming increases us a longing for this face-to-face fellowship. And what we are longing for is his bodily presence, the one who came from glory and died for us, and who has walked with us day by day to bring us to the Father and kept us to the end.

[14 : 08] And when we see him, we'll see his face. We'll see his face that is full of glory. We'll not, there'll be no fear. The Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts, will swallow all our sinful desires.

It's just, it's almost too much. It's almost too good to be true. And it's not just that God's love controls the future.

It's not just that he promises the best is yet to come. It's not just, as we heard the choir singing a moment ago, that he will be the full gratification of all pleasure and treasure of our deepest desires.

But God also energizes us, his love energizes us now to live in the present, secondly. And since God has adopted us into his family, and he's given us new birth by the Spirit, it means that the Christian faith is not a long list of rules.

It's not a mighty moral effort. It's not a grudging grind. It's growing in family likeness and abiding in Jesus and imitating him.

[15 : 18] This is so important to me. For many years in my Christian life, I thought it was about working harder. All the mighty effort, it's not. It's about abiding in Jesus. So look at verse 3.

Everyone who hopes in him purifies himself now as he is pure. It's the hope of our future fellowship, face-to-face fellowship, and Jesus' present shining purity that leads us to be dissatisfied with our sin and gives us a desire to live like Jesus.

The more you grow to be like Jesus, the more aware you are of your sins, and the more you look to him for grace. I had a good friend who became a Christian in his 20s, and he said six months into his Christian faith, he was so much more aware of his sin than before.

He was a happy sinner before he became a Christian. He was a miserable sinner afterwards. But Christian growth doesn't come from screwing up your eyes hard and massive effort.

It comes from abiding in Jesus, knowing him more and more, walking with him, seeing sin as he does, hating it, but loving him and walking more like him. And the key to the likeness, the family likeness, comes to us in dramatic fashion in verse 10.

[16 : 37] Just look down with me. By this it is evident, who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil? Now, John, that's just a little bit harsh, isn't it? Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

This is the starkest possible language in the New Testament, because along with the stunning love of God, which is higher than we can reach for, is this shocking truth that there are two humanities, one into which we're born naturally, which is all of us, the other is the other into which we're born by new birth, by the Holy Spirit.

And those two humanities have two spiritual fathers, the devil and God himself. And there are two different ways of living. And we keep wanting to invent a middle category.

We want a category for nice, decent Canadians who are morally upright, don't cheat on their taxes. But search high and low in the Bible or the New Testament, you'll never find that third group.

Because the main impulse of the human heart, apart from God's grace, is towards sin. And John tells us two things about the essence of sin.

[17 : 57] Number one, he says it's always directed against God. And that's the point of verse four. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.

He's not talking about disobeying the road rules. It's the law of God. Sin is a vertical issue. It's saying, I refuse your right, God, to say what is right and wrong.

Shove off God, I'm in control. No to your law. It's not just selfishness. It's not just doing bad things that mess up my life. It's a deeply personal violation and betrayal of God as God.

It's me saying, I want to play God. You can't play God. It's crowning myself. It's saying, I have the right to determine right from wrong. That's the first thing John says about sin, which is very helpful to us.

And the second thing he says is that it works in the way that the devil worked in the Garden of Eden in verse eight. Because in our hearts, we suspect that God does not really have our best interest in heart.

[19 : 02] That's why we hold back from obeying him. That what he says in his word, he doesn't really mean. That we're in a much better place to be able to decide right and wrong.

But if you are a child of God, and if you're born into his family, you and I know two things. The first in verse five, you know that he appeared in order to take away sin, and in him there is no sin.

And secondly, in verse eight, the reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. See, if we grasp that the mission of Jesus was to come and bear away our sins, we can't just happily dive into sin.

And then he says it's not enough to be forgiven. Jesus actually came to destroy all the works of the devil. Not just our guilt and sin, but the darkness and our desires and our death, dealing, cruelty to each other.

And for those who belong to Jesus, John says the mark of our life is righteousness. Not self-righteousness. Not being too good, better than other people.

[20 : 13] But it's the righteousness that is in Jesus, which rubs off, literally comes to us as we abide in him and grow closer to him daily. That's what it means in 2.29.

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. And righteousness in John, the letter of John, is just another word for Christ-likeness.

And the primary mark of righteousness is love. Verse 10. Love, particularly toward our brothers and our sisters, which you'll pick up next week as you continue in John.

God is love. Jesus has come to show us what love really is. And when we're adopted into the family of God, we discover we have spiritual brothers and sisters, some of whom are a complete pain in the neck.

And whenever we see that, we just recognise how much a pain in the neck we are to them. If we call God our Father and call Christ our brother, part of belonging to a body of the church is to grow in the practical work of loving each other, of treating each other better than ourselves, of doing what we can for the spiritual benefit of our brothers and sisters.

[21 : 33] So here is the love of God, and it energises us to long for the future, and it energises us to live in the presence. And what a joy it is to be able to preach these truths to you again.

I preach them first to myself and then to you. And I shouldn't tell you this, but when we get to heaven, you will realise that I'm the one who benefited far more by preparing and preaching than any of you ever have.

And what a God we have. There is no God like him, nor his son Jesus Christ. In him are the treasure of treasures, beyond treasures, the riches of joy and wisdom and understanding.

And does God love us with an everlasting love? Yes, he does. And does he make us our children by adoption and grace? Yes, he does.

And does he promise to keep us until we see him face to face? Yes, he does. And next week you will meet here as you open his word, and the terrific preachers and teachers who are sitting behind me here will bring God's word to you.

[22 : 55] And when the new minister comes, he will be a gift and delight, but until then, trust God, hope in Christ, and love one another.

Amen.