

Adopted?

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn to God's Word. If you have a Bible, we're in 1 John and we're finishing chapter 2 and we're then diving into chapter 3. You can see it on the screen if you don't have it to hand, but we're reading in 1 John chapter 2 and we're starting at 28, verse 28.

And now, dear children, continue in him 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. Everyone who sins breaks the law. In fact, sin is lawlessness.

But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins and in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God's will continue to sin because God's seed remains in them. They cannot go on sinning because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are. Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. For this is the message you heard from the beginning. We should love one another. Do not be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. And let me sneak on into next week's passage, verse 16. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. And may God speak to us through his words today. There are so many different ways in which we could look at this passage today. But I want to very simply look first of all at what we are and what he has done, what we will be, and in the context of all those three things, what we are, what he's done, what we will be. In the context of all three, think about the difference that that makes to our lives today. If I were to say to you, or if the person next to you were to say to you this morning, who are you, what would your answer be? Think about it. You're meeting somebody for coffee afterwards and they say, who are you? What's your first answer? Is it to say, well, you give your name perhaps, yeah? No, no, no, that's your name. But tell me, tell me more. Tell me what you really are. Do you perhaps think about your family? Well, I come from this particular family. Or do you start saying, well, I live in this particular place? Or do you start quickly? Maybe I suspect many of us start saying, well, you know, I'm a teacher, or I'm a doctor, or I'm a nurse, or I'm a student, or I'm looking for a job, or these are the things that I am. I wonder how many of us would say, what am I? I'm a child of God. What am I? I've been adopted into God's family. What am I? I'm loved by the gods of eternity. That, brothers and sisters, friends, today is what Paul, is what the writer

John wants us to understand as he comes and brings us this passage. He wants us to understand our identity. He wants us to understand that what we are, before our human name, certainly before our occupation, before any other attributes, that what we are, if we've come to know Jesus, is that we are children of God. He seems as though, if you look through the passage, that he has to emphasize this time and time again in many different ways, because others will contradict it. Others will not be ready to remind us of the fact that we are children of God. So follow through the passage with me, starting at chapter 3, verse 1. See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. This is what you are. But look at what he has to say. That is what we are. He has to repeat it. You're children of God. That is what we are. I'd love it if that could be ringing in our ears today. That is what we are. Maybe somebody could get the door there. We are children of God.

[5 : 24] That is what we are. But he has to say it again. Verse 2, dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. Verse 7, dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. Verse 9, no one who is born of God will continue to sin. You see, they record it again.

Children, you've been born of God. You're part of God's family. You're a child of God. There it is again at the end of verse 9, because they have been born of God. There it is again in verse 2, verse 10. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are.

Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child. Time and time and time again, in these few verses, he's telling us what we are. That our identity is not in our background. It's not in our upbringing. It's not in our profession. It's not in our wealth or our lack thereof. Our identity is as the beloved of God's. A child of God's. Loved by God. We could go on to say as we look at that passage. A traveller. Many not recognising who we are. Passing through, looking to our ultimate destination, which we believe will be so much greater than anything that we can have here.

But ultimately, a child of God's. I wonder what it'd be like, folks, if we were to see ourselves increasingly as the beloved of God. Let me read to you just a little quote from the theologian Henry Nguyen, where he encourages us not to put ourselves down and not to indulge in self-rejection, as he calls it, because we're the beloved of God. And he says, and what I've found and reflected on is quite a profound passage. A challenge to us listening to the voices that call us worthless or unlovable. And it's when we do so that success and popularity and power can easily be seen as attractive solutions. And he says this, self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the beloved. Pause on that. The sacred voice that calls us, that calls you, that calls me the beloved, that calls you a child of God, that reminds you that you're someone who has had God's love lavished on us. Being the beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence, he says. Let me repeat that. Being the beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.

This is what we are, the beloved of God. How should that impact on how we see ourselves and crucially how we see others? As the beloved of God, we have great strength to show love to others. We've seen that in 1 John 1 and 2 about the love that we're expected to pour out to others. We see it again at the end of our passage and we'll see it next week. As the beloved of God, we're those who are expected to be extravagant in our love to others. What are you? A child of God. And Paul says, that is what you are.

[8 : 50] The world doesn't know it. The world may contradict it. The world may try and give you all sorts of different identities. But folks, if today we could leave saying we're a child of God, known and loved by God, that is what we are. It's going to stand us in great stead for all that lies ahead this week and in the days ahead. A child of God, that is what we are. What we are, what he's done.

Many of you have heard one of the stories which for me just captures beautifully. A simple story which captures some of what God has done. Let me try and tell it to you today. There's a fishing village on the coast of Denmark, off the coast of Denmark.

And in that village, there is a group of very pious religious individuals. A small sect where they kept their eyes focused on what they felt was the greater days to come when they would finally reach the heavenly shores. The leader, a very serious man, had led his little tribe and then had died. And his two daughters were the ones who sought to follow in his footsteps.

They wore black. They felt their life should be marked by self-denial. They ate only gruel and sometimes as a special treat, some boiled cod. And these two daughters, Martine and Philippa, sought to lead this little group of people. But it dwindled in numbers and increasingly felt struggling and pretty miserable. Martine and Philippa tried their best. But that little group of only about a dozen people were riven with divisions. Two sisters refused to teach each other about some feud that had gone on for years and years. Two men felt that one had cheated the other over a business deal and would have nothing to do with each other. But still, Martine and Philippa, who had had various friends, including a couple of men who had wanted to marry them at points and who they had rejected in order that they might pursue this little work, tried to struggle on.

One night, in the driving rain and wind, a woman, Babette, arrives at their door and comes with a letter from one of the suitors of Martine, a letter which says, please take this woman in.

[11 : 14] She has no money, but she can cook. Martine and Philippa are not at all sure about inviting this stranger into their house, but with some hesitation, they invite her in. And over the next 15 years, Babette works with Martine and Philippa. She asks for nothing, but what she does is learn to cook this gruel and sometimes this cod for these two sisters and for this little congregation. Day after day, year after year, she works for them. Twelve years later, a letter arrives to Babette one day to say, Babette, someone who you knew back in Paris has been entering the lottery for you every single week and your number has come up and you've just won 10,000 francs. At the same time, it's the 100th anniversary of the guy who founded this little congregation in Denmark. And the sisters, Martine and Philippa, I think it would be nice to celebrate it in some way. Babette speaks up. She says to Martine and Philippa, for 12 years, I've worked here and I have asked you for nothing. For 12 years, all I've done is make your gruel and your cod. Now, I have one request. To mark this 100th anniversary, would you allow me to prepare you a feast? They think we're not too sure about this. We're quite happy with gruel and with our boiled cod. But they consult and they say, no, it is true. She hasn't asked for anything. We better allow her to prepare us this feast. But their consternation grows as over the next week or two, they see truckload after truckload coming into their little village as they see some magnificent and unusual food entering into their village, things that they've never seen before. They see boats dock and out of the boats are brought animals, are brought birds, are brought fish. They see the most incredible wine and indeed champagne being brought into their village and their consternation grows and they say to one another, we're really not sure we should be having this worldly feast at all.

They conclude that it would be rude to refuse to have the feast, but what they will do throughout it all is sit in absolute silence. The day comes. The day comes and Babette's work comes to fruition.

And the 12 villagers from that church sit there and Babette begins to bring out the food. She serves the drinks. There's one man who comes to visit who shows great appreciation and who struggles to understand the silence of the villagers as course after course after course of magnificent food is presented before them. Something happens. Slowly, gradually, some of their hearts begin to be melted. And while they do not express appreciation, they do begin to talk to one another. Some of them begin to reflect on days of old. The two sisters who hadn't spoken for 12 years start exchanging words and discover that actually they like one another's company. The two men who had cheated one another confess it and confess it and before long they're talking and even laughing together. And at the end of this story, there are two final scenes. In one scene, the little villagers go outside, their stomachs full, their hearts cheered from the banquet that has been spread in front of them. And we see them dancing around the fountain in the snow, singing the songs of old that for a long time they had stopped singing.

The other scene takes us into Babette's kitchen. And in that kitchen, we see Babette absolutely exhausted, sitting in front of piles and piles and piles and piles of dirty dishes and bottles.

And Martine comes in to Babette and says, Babette, it was quite a nice dinner. She said, Babette, we'll remember you when you go back to Paris.

[15 : 17] And Babette's response is, I'll never be going back to Paris. I won that money, but you don't realize I used to be a chef in the Café Anglais in Paris and that meal is what I would have made there.

And that meal for 12 people in the Café Anglais with those at drinks costs 10,000 francs. I've spent absolutely everything I have, Martine, on that meal for you. So I'm not going back to Paris.

I'm staying here. Just a nice story. I think there are two lessons which we need to get from that story today.

Babette held nothing back. She gave her all to those individuals, even though by all accounts they were undeserving, they were ungrateful, they were in some ways even unwilling to receive it.

She allowed them to feast on the finest of food when previously they had known only gruel. She treated them as her nearest and dearest, as the dearly loved, despite them not deserving in any way and them offering her no thanks. Folks, we've thought about what we are and I want to use this simple story to emphasize what he has done. Verse 1, he has lavished love on us. The story that I've heard before that I've recounted to you came to mind through that word lavish. He has lavished his love on us. He's not given us just a little. It's not been given sparingly. But a bit like Babette's feast where more food was poured out than they could ever have imagined. That is the sense of what God has done as he has lavished his love on us. And verse 1, he's made us his dear children. Verse 5, he has taken away our sins. Those things which bound us like balls and chains. Those sins which held onto us, which have caused us such misery, he threw his death on the cross, Jesus Christ, the sinless one, has taken them away. Verse 8, he has destroyed the devil's work. He who is the enemy of our souls and who seek to bring only destruction to us has been destroyed through Christ. Verse 9, he has given us new life and new birth so that we can read that we are born of God. And verse 2, he has given us a great hope for the future so that what we have and are now is as nothing compared to the hope that we have for the future.

[17 : 57] And suddenly when we look at this, we realize that that little story pales into insignificance because what he has done is lavished on us his grace, his love, and his mercy.

Brunsfeld, verse 16 says, this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And in the coming weeks, we're going to read so many other verses that remind us of the fact that what we are is children of God and what he's done is poured out extravagant love and grace into our lives. Chapter 4, verse 9, this is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him. Chapter 4, verse 19, we love because he first loved us.

This week and in the weeks ahead, we're going to hear it again and again and again. We're going to hear that we're God's dearly loved, that he's lavished his grace and goodness into our lives. And I wonder if we'll let it really sink in and if we'll allow it to change us. When we're inclined to negativity, to envy, to hatred, to sin, will we come back to the truth that we are people who have been recipients of God's lavish love? Will we stay close to that truth? Will we remain in it? Will we abide in him? Will we not move away from the fact that our identity is as people loved by God?

Ephesians chapter 3, verse 17, Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they would be rooted and established in love. In the New Living Translation, it says, may your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. I absolutely love that phrase. Can you imagine it being a gardener and trying to just really dig, dig, dig down deep so that that plant that you've got is going to really flourish and blossom? That's the sense that all of us, if we are going to flourish, our roots need to be going down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love, absolutely confident that that is what we are, those who are loved by God. But the same way as being children of God is mentioned about eight times in the passage, so is the word sin mentioned a lot. In fact, it's there about 10 times if you cast your eye over the second part of chapter 3. And again, for me, the little story about Babette that I've told you just perhaps captures some of the thrust of the challenge that we are given in this passage about the incongruity of being children of God, dearly loved by God, and yet people who at the same time think that it's okay to continue in sin and in rebellion against God. Isn't it odd? Isn't it odd that those villagers at that feast wanted to sit in silence while an abundance of food and a feast was being presented to them? Wouldn't it be odd if they had sat and said, we'd much rather the gruel than this wonderful fare that has been presented to them?

[21 : 13] I think we need to see that continuing in sin is a bit like saying, no thank you, we'll just have the gruel despite the feast that is made available to us. I've been struck this way. Isn't it easy when we read verses like these ones? Verse 6, no one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Verse 9, no one who's born of God will continue to sin. That somehow or other it's seen as telling us that we must try really hard to deny stuff that's really good.

Do you get that slight sense? You know, we need to really try hard to put aside all of these temptations which, you know, yes, are very attractive, but we want to put them to one side.

But look at the context and look at what we're told. Verse 5, he appeared so that he might take away our sins. Our sins are not good things. Our sins are the things that stop us from being the people that God wants us to be and ultimately, if not dealt with through Jesus, are the things that stop us realizing that eternal destiny of being in heaven with Christ.

Christ. And Jesus appears and puts away our sins. He appears and takes them away and instead offers us all these great things. And the author comes and says, in light of that, in light of the fact that he has taken them away, why would we want them back? He's taken them away. Why do we want to grasp them and grab them and hold them back near to us? Now, of course, we know from the context from 1 John 1 that sin will still be possible, that indeed we will still continue to sin at times. But as those loved by God, as those rooted and grounded in God's love, isn't it the case, folks, that we should increasingly be disgusted by that sin? Drawn to God rather than to the devil. And having tasted the feast, we say, no, I don't want the gruel having been lavished with love and grace. We don't want to return to a life that's marked by just guilt and sin and hatred. Can we allow the love and generosity and grace of God this morning to draw us to him, to cause us to rejoice in him, to cling to him, and indeed to look forward to what we will be, rather than to hark back to what was ultimately the days where we knew only grew. What we will be, sorry, what we are, what he's done, and what we will be. It's good now, it's good to be people who live as children of God, loved by him, and yet the amazing thing is we're told at the start of this passage that, dear friends, now we are children of God, verse 2, but 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. What we will be has not yet been made known. I wonder which of us, if we decided to go on a holiday, let's say down to Windsor, and we'd hope to see Windsor Castle, because we'd heard it was a splendid castle. And as we drove, we saw a little signpost, you know the little brown signs, with a little picture of a castle, and it said Windsor Castle, and there was an arrow to it. And we looked at that sign, and we looked at that picture, you know the ones, and we thought that is a beautiful picture of Windsor Castle.

We can go home now. We've seen the sign, we've seen the image, it says Windsor Castle this way, it's brown, it's white, there's a little cross in the middle of it. Fantastic. I think there's a little bit of a sense of this in this passage. We're on a journey, God is bestowing us with so many great things, but you know, to be content with only this is a bit like being content with just the signpost to the castle, when actually the castle, when we see it itself in all its glory, will be as nothing compared to what is ultimately just a silly little signpost that is pointing to the real thing. 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. This is our great hope, that one day we will be like Jesus. And we come back to the challenge of this reality. The challenge is that now if you've got this hope, we purify ourselves just as he is pure. We're out of time and we need to finish.

[26 : 06] But I learned something this week. I learned from a psychologist from the University of Michigan. Who knows whether it's true or not, but this is what he said. He said that he studied people's faces, faces, in particular the faces of people who have lived together for many, many, many years.

And did you know that apparently if you live with someone and particularly if you are happily living with someone for many, many years, your faces will start to resemble each other.

Aileen's looking particularly worried about this reality. Maybe some others are also particularly considered, but no, you love each other. You gaze at their face day in, day out. You do so for years.

You will start to copy their expressions and your face will change and your face will start to look more like that person you love. Let's not get too caught up with whether that's true or not.

But let's take the point, shall we? And let's come back to 1 John, to this promise that one day we will look on Jesus and incredibly, incredibly, we will be like him. We've thought of all that he's done. We've thought of his boundless love and generosity. We've thought of how he gave absolutely all. And we're told here, one day you'll look at him and you will be like him. For you will see him as he is. And the challenge in the here and now, the challenge for while we remain travelers here, is to increasingly in the here and now gaze upon his face, look upon his characteristics, think of all that he has done. In the words of verse 4, purify ourselves as he is pure. And maybe even now we will increasingly be like our Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't that something to aim for?

[28 : 04] Isn't that a great goal? That his characteristics will increasingly be marked on our faces, on our lives, and on our hearts as we pour out our lives in love for others. Let's pray.

We thank you, Lord Jesus, that through your love and grace, those of us who simply say yes to you, know what it is to be loved by God and to be children of God.

Lord, that is what we are. May that fact transform us this day and in the days ahead, we pray. Amen.