

CHILDREN OF GOD AND MORE TO COME
(SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2018)

Scripture: Psalm 27; 1 John 3:1-3

INTRODUCTION

Think of our memory verse for this month in conjunction with our passage from 1 John 3.

The gospel message is to go into all the world. The message of salvation and the teaching of Jesus are not to be embraced simply in private. We are not to simply hide in our homes or churches.

On the other hand, as we know from 1 John 3 and many other passages, there will always be a conflict when the truth of the gospel is spread.

Today we more and more clearly see the hatred for the truth of Scripture. The same was true in the first century.

John's ministry in the first century world was no more welcomed than true ministry is today in the 21st century world.

The world, that which is hostile to God and lost in sin, will always stand against the truth.

John Calvin wrote on the verses we consider today:

“Physically, we are dust and a shadow, and death is always before our eyes. We are exposed to a thousand miseries and our souls to innumerable evils, so that we always find a hell within us. The more necessary is it that our senses should be withdrawn from the view of present things, lest the miseries . . . should shake our trust in that happiness which as yet is hidden.”

In the verses that we consider today, John brings us comfort and assurance while again reminding us that this life is not pointless or vain.

The hope that we are to have should lead us to even greater purity and service for our Lord even as we keep in mind the best is still yet to come.

Let me share two other illustrations as part of the introduction for our text.

Some of you might remember probably 20 or 25 years ago when a group of children visited from Russia.

These children came from wealthier families, but when they visited our school they were fascinated by our vending machines.

To us this is no big deal, but to these children this was an amazing find. They could easily just get whatever they wanted.

A second illustration – about a year ago or so, a video was widely shared on the internet of some Christians in China receiving a Bible for the first time.

Tears of joy and excitement filled their faces.

Do we approach our Bibles this same way?

The answer is no. We have lots of Bibles and by God's grace we have been able to read and study the Bible for years.

What is my point?

When we read 1 John, we are blessed by having many years of study and reading of God's Word including perhaps reading and studying 1 John many times before.

It is easy to read without much thought and just move on.

We have to try, as best we can, to read this text as John's first readers.

Of course, we don't know all their backgrounds. We don't know all the challenges they were facing, but we can say that nothing John wrote was just filler material.

It was all very precious and needful truth.

Facing a variety of challenges and struggles, they needed to be reminded of the blessings they now enjoyed and the blessing still to come.

That is the challenge for us – to appreciate and apply God's truth.

We are the beloved children of God now and even more glory awaits us!

1) Where are we in 1 John?

2) 1 John 3:1

3) 1 John 3:2-3

1. WHERE ARE WE IN 1 JOHN?

By this question, I obviously don't mean what is our passage?

Rather I mean, where are we in terms of the message of 1 John? How does the start of 1 John 3 fit into what we have already seen in 1 John?

1 John 3:1-3 is our 10th message in the text of 1 John.

So where are we?

Let us begin by reviewing the main themes that are present in 1 John.

John MacArthur suggests there are three sub-themes: joy, holiness, and security. These themes appear throughout the book.

And another commentator and one of my former professors at Trinity also suggests three main themes: truth, holiness/sincerity, and Christian love.¹

We see these three themes in our passage today.

John assures his readers again of the truth, who we are in light of God's salvation. He speaks of the love that God has given to us. He speaks of hope and how that relates now to holiness and purity.

Let me share again the outline suggested by Robert Yarbrough.

1 John 1:1-2:6 – Central burden: God is light (1:5)

1 John 2:7-17 – Primary Commandment: Embody the age-old message

1 John 2:18-3:8 – Key Counsel: Abide in his anointing and receive eternal life

Now let us consider the end of chapter 2 and our text the opening verses of chapter 3.

One translation suggests that 1 John 3:1-3 should be put in parentheses because 3:4 connects with 2:29. And what we see in verses 1-3 is additional reflection on what it means to be born of God.

¹ Yarbrough, 30.

While I think we have to be very careful in how we use parentheses in a Bible translation, this suggestion does make some sense.

The opening verses of chapter 3 discuss the new birth and the glorious return of Christ, which is something we see also at the end of 1 John 2.

What we have here as one commentator points out is a chiasm:

Return of Christ - parousia (2:28)

new birth (2:29)

new birth (3:1)

Return of Christ - parousia (3:2).²

Let us now focus on verses 1-3 in two parts – Behold the love the Father has given to us and the promise that the best is still to come.

1) BEHOLD THE LOVE THE FATHER HAS GIVEN TO US, 1 JOHN 3:1

1John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

The word translated as **behold** is a command or imperative!

As a command, this word is used 10 times in the NT.

Matt. 28:6 He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, **see** the place where the Lord lay.

John 4:29 “Come, **see** a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”

John calls for you to carefully and joyfully examine or think about the love the Father has given to us.

² Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC 51; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 140.

The word translated as **what manner** also is not common in the NT. It used for things admirable in character and also implies astonishment.³

Now the word translated as bestowed is a rather common word in the NT, usually just translated as give or given in this context.

Bestowed is a word that comes from Middle English and here seeks to capture how special this gift truly is.

Now we are at the start of the season where gifts are often given.

And one of the sad things that we see today is how gifts are just often assumed or taken for granted.

John writes to remind us that the glorious truth of the Father's love should never be just assumed.

My guess is that if you took a poll today, most people would say that **all people are God's children** – every single person living today.

Well, God is the creator of all people.

All men, women, and children are without excuse as they stand before God as creator.

But can all people claim the Father's love and the title children of God?

The answer is no.

This is something given; it is not earned or deserved, but it is received in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Robert Yarbrough notes in his commentary on how 1 John has more occurrences of love per 1000 words than any other book in the NT.

John is the Apostle of Love in this sense, in the calling he was given to write about the glory of God's gift of love.

Now in order to appreciate this glorious truth you have to again consider how unlovable you truly are before a holy, just, and good God.

³ GNT Key, s.v. 1 John 3:1.

One of our greatest mistakes is not recognizing how disgusting and filthy we would be before a holy and perfect God.

Imagine sitting down with family and friends for a delicious meal when your doorbell rings.

You open the door and before you stands the most disheveled and smelly person you could imagine – a potpourri of liquor, urine, and worse.

Do you invite this person into your beautiful dining room for a meal or do you point him to Pacific Garden Mission?

Can we even begin to grasp how much more unlovable we are before God?

And yet God in His mercy has loved us and even more calls us His children!

John Calvin wrote:

It behooves us especially to understand this doctrine; for since the only cause of our salvation is adoption, and since the Apostle testifies that this flows from the mere love of God alone, there is nothing left to our worthiness or to the merits of works. For why are we sons? Even because God began to love us freely, when we deserved hatred rather than love. And as the Spirit is a pledge of our adoption, it hence follows, that if there be any good in us, it ought not to be set up in opposition to the grace of God, but, on the contrary, to be ascribed to him.

Now look at the second half of verse 1 beginning with therefore.

Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

When you see the word **therefore**, sometimes it refers to what comes before it and sometimes what follows.

Does the world not know us because the Father has loved us or does the world not know us because it did not know Him, speaking of Christ?

We could say that both are true.

Based on the grammar, it is more likely that John is saying that just as the world did not know Jesus Christ, the world did not recognize him as the Son of God, so also the world does not understand God's work of grace in our own lives.⁴

What John writes here is a summary of what we find in fuller measure in John 15:18 and following.

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. **19** If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. **20** Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. **21** But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. **22** If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. **23** He who hates Me hates My Father also.

We might say that what John writes here is obvious, but it is still very important.

It can be easy to think of your circumstances as evidence of whether you are truly loved by God.

But just looking at the outward circumstances of life can be very dangerous.

John working in the first century found no love from the world.

Why should we expect it in our own day?

There is a hostility that you can always expect from this world, even as we seek to reach the world with the glorious truth of the gospel.

2) THE PROMISE THAT THE BEST IS STILL TO COME, 1 JOHN 3:2-3

1John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

⁴ NET Bible, s.v. 1 John 3:1.

1John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

There is such richness in the teaching, the theology of this letter.

Here John emphasizes the blessed state that we have now but the promise that the best is still to come.

What is true now is our adoption – now we are children of God.

But something better awaits being revealed.

The verb **revealed** is used two times in verse 2. The same verb is used in 2:28 where it is translated as “when He **appears...**”

John says what we shall be has not yet been revealed.

What does John mean here? There are two related aspects. What is most clear is that we have not yet been glorified.

Another aspect is that we don't even know the fulness of the glory to come.

The Bible speaks of the glory to come, but not all the details have been given nor could we understand it.

We do know that when our Lord returns in triumph and glory, then the fulness of God's plan of redemption will be complete.

As Jesus Christ has been glorified so we also will be glorified.

We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Have you ever wondered what the eternal state will be like?

At this point, our view of eternity is shaped by what we are now such that we wonder, what are we going to do with eternity?

Won't it get boring to spend eternity in the heavenly state?

What we forget is that what we are now is not what we will one day be.

We will glorified and transformed. Our bodies will be resurrected and clothed in glory.

Now as we consider this subject, it is important to keep in mind what the Bible says about death and the final state of glorification.

For the believer, death does mean that we enter a new state where we are present with the Lord.

Listen to two passages from Paul on this.

2Cor. 5:6 So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. **7** For we walk by faith, not by sight. **8** We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Phil. 1:23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. **24** Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you.

But it is important to emphasize that death does not bring the fulness of God's plan of redemption to a close.

At death the soul of a believer does not sleep. But death does not bring about the state of glorification.

The final state of glorification happens with the glorious return of Christ as we see here in 1 John 3 and in other passages.

When He is revealed, that is at the second coming and resurrection, then the fulness of God's work of salvation and redemption is brought to a climax.

Let us consider several key passages that parallel what John is saying here.

Phil. 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Rom. 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

1 Cor. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— **52** in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

So for the believer, we should not simply long for death. We long for the state of glorification at the return of Christ.

Our blessed hope is not our own death but the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

Let us close by considering further verse 3.

John uses an interesting word in verse 3 translated as purify. In John 11:55 and also in Acts 21 and 24 the verb has reference to the ceremonial law and purification rituals for celebrating the Passover or entering the temple.

Obviously, John is not speaking of being purified according to the ceremonial law in verse 3.

John uses this verb to remind us of the challenge and calling that is set before us.

Do you have hope of entering into the presence of Almighty God?

Prepare yourself by living a purified life now!

Now, certainly John is not speaking of earning the right to enter into the presence of God.

John is not suggesting that we will one day reach a state of sinless perfection and because we reach this state, we are given access into God's presence.

John already has spoken numerous times of forgiveness of sins. So any idea that we through our own actions make ourselves pure is shown to be false.

On the other hand, the idea that it doesn't matter what you do in this life is ridiculous.⁵

⁵ NET Bible, s.v. 1 John 3:2.

So how do we live this purified life?

It is a life of faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire then to live as He lived.

It means that we often confess our sins and consider how much we need our Savior.

It means a desire to grow in maturity that we seek to grow in faith and obedience.

But the heart of this life is trusting and rejoicing that we have a Savior, a High Priest, an advocate.

Notice the focus at the end of verse 3 – just as He is pure!

Your focus must be the absolute purity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are the beloved children of God now and even more glory awaits us!

CONCLUSION

Starting with the end of 1 John 2 through these opening verses of chapter 3 there are five aspects of hope that John brings to our attention.

1) 2:28 – The hope of Christ's return produces the effect of continual abiding in every true believer as they long for the glorious future prepared for them.

2) 2:29 – The hope of Christ's return should enable to make doing what is right a pattern in our lives.

3) 3:1 – Our hope is strengthened knowing that God in His love and mercy has made His children.

4) 3:2 – Our hope is fixed on the glory to come – we shall be like Him.

5) 3:3 – What is perhaps the key verse in this section. Since the promise is that we will be like Him, the desire should also be to live like He did now!⁶

Prayer

⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), s.v. 1 John 2:28-3:3.

Hymn 442

BENEDICTION: 1 COR 15:57-58

“But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”