**“GOD’S CHILDREN.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: I John 2:28 – 3:3**

**Introduction.**

John is writing out of a heart of love and he is writing to those he loves with all his heart. Notice the manner in which he addresses them. My little children, beloved, little children, children. This is not meant to be demeaning or derogatory, but terms of endearment. He is like a loving and caring father to them, he has their spiritual interests at heart.

So when he commands them, he is commanding them not as a master or a boss, but as one who is seeking their very best. He is persuading them out of love, not guilt or shame or self-interest.

**Verses 28-29, abide in Christ so that when He appears.**

Notice the assumption that’s taken for granted. Of this there ought to be no doubt, Jesus is coming again.

His second coming will not be like His first coming. His first coming was small, private, to a virgins womb and to an Innkeepers manger. When the heavenly host filled the sky, the shepherds were the only ones to see it.

His second coming will be in great glory and splendor and majesty. The heavens will be opened and every eye will see Him.

***This coming of Christ will produce two very distinct and opposite responses.***

But for those who don’t know Him this will be a moment of unspeakable horror and terror. They will be utterly undone and ashamed of their unbelief, ingratitude, and the audacity of denying so great a God and so perfect a Redeemer. The depravity of their hearts and minds will be completely exposed. They will hate Him from a hard and unrepentant heart.

They will be like Adam trying to hid in the garden out of dread. John describes this reaction in graphic terms in Revelation.

**Revelation 6:15b-17** [they] hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

If the boss come back after a long absence and finds you asleep at your desk or up in the hay mound, if the teacher comes back in the class room and finds chaos, if the parents come home to a wild party, there is going to be hell to pay. Figuratively in those scenarios, and literally when Jesus return.

But for those who know are abiding in Christ, who are children of God, it will be a moment of unspeakable joy and triumph. This will be the moment of our complete and final redemption, this will be the beginning of glory.

There is no greater or more glorious privilege and honor than to be children of God. Which takes us to one of the most amazing verses in the Bible.

**I John 3:1, children of God.**

**I John 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.

Our English translations can’t do justice to John’s words and tone of voice here. It’s as if he was saying, “Everyone, come, look, look at this, this is amazing, you got to see this.” John may be an old man but there is still something that amazes him and excites him and he can’t wait to tell everyone.

John is stretching to find words that can do justice to what God has done. God has done something completely uncommon and out of the ordinary. God’s generosity far exceeds any human ability to comprehend it.

The RTW amplified version says it this way: Behold, what unheard of great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God, and not just called, but we actually are His children.

Let me tell a story (not original with me, by John Piper) that tries to capture the magnitude of what God has done for us.

“Suppose you are a little boy playing in your village in a jungle in Africa and suddenly you hear screams and running. You turn and all you see is angry, shouting men, running toward you with machetes. You run as fast as you can and hide. And when you come out, everyone is gone or dead. Your mother is dead. Your father is dead. Your brothers and sisters are dead.

You sob yourself to sleep on the body of your mother as the sun goes down. You wake up to realize you are not only terrified the enemy might come back, but you are very thirsty and hungry. And it hits you there is no one to take care of you or save you from the enemies or from the wild animals or sickness. You are utterly alone. You find some bananas in a house and eat them. And another day passes. You don't have any idea what to do. And you begin to think you will die.

Then you hear a sound and turn to see a tall man standing in the dirt square. He calls out to you in your own language and says, "Don't be afraid. I want to help you." You want to run, but there is no place to run, and nobody to run to. He comes over to you and pulls some bread out of his pouch and gives you some. You eat it. And then he gives you some water from his water-skin.

He says, "I tried to stop them." And you notice the lacerations on his arms and head. He says, "If you come with me, I'll take care of you. I'm very sorry about your mother and father. I'll help you bury them." As you work together to bury the dead, you begin to talk to him. And you learn that he belongs to the tribe that slaughtered your village and family. You also learn that he and his little son were in the tribal meeting when the band decided to raid your village. They disagreed with the raid, and put themselves between their fellow kinsman and your village. As a result the band of raiders killed the man's son as he tried to protect your village. And suddenly you feel an overwhelming sense that this man loves you. It cost him his son to try to save you.

Not only that, it gradually comes out that your village has made horrible raids on his relatives in years past, and that your own father was an archenemy of this very man and had tried several times to kill him. At first that makes you very afraid. But then you realize, this man is trying to save you in spite of all this animosity between your tribes and families. And your sense of being loved becomes stronger. Hope starts to rise in your broken heart that maybe there would be life beyond the loss of your mother and father and brothers and sisters.

You agree to go with the man. Over the next several months you learn the almost unbelievable truth that this man has a university education from Oxford; that he is a very wealthy businessman with homes in Africa and Europe and Asia. You don't understand it all, but over time you learn not only has he rescued you from death, but he is supplying all your needs beyond what you could have imagined.

He takes you into his home in Africa and you take long vacations with him to Europe. And with every new lavish gift you feel more and more loved. He rescued you; it cost him his son's life in the process. You were part of a tribe that hated him and his father. And now, as the years go by, you become old enough to understand that, on top of all this, he has taken care of all the affairs for you to be his legal son. And you learn he has signed over to you all his wealth as an inheritance” (John Piper).

This is the kind of extravagance behind John's words in 1 John 3:1:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God.

Not only did it cost Him His Son to save us, and not only were we His enemies, and not only did He forgive us and pardon us, He showed us an even greater and more extravagant love by taking us into His own family as His own children.

God of His own free will and choice, choses some to be His sons and daughters, through no merit or deserving or action of their own. It is wholly and utterly an act of God's spontaneous and uncoerced love.

Our adoption is all the more remarkable in that it was a ***special needs adoption***. It is a huge step when a couple decides to adopt and a quantum leap when they decide they will take a special needs baby. Rarely do couples adopt special needs children, downs children, spina bifida children, handicapped children.

But such were we. God didn’t choose the best or smartest or ones from a good background. We are diseased, deformed, broken, unwanted, homeless, helpless, hopeless, lying in the gutter of sin, in the poverty and bankruptcy of spiritual death, God stooped down and picked us up, not to be foster kids, but to be His children.

He holds nothing back. He gives us the title of sons. We are given a new name, from slave to son; from sinner to saint. We are given all the rights and privileges of sons, so much so that we are made to be heirs along with His natural Son, and given the right to occupy a similar place of privilege.

We all know how ***incredibly expensive adoption is***, costing thousands of dollars and lots of prayers and patience. But how do you reconcile heaven and hell? How do you make children of wrath into children of promise? It cost God the death of His only natural born Son to make us adopted sons. When God created us it only cost Him the speaking of a word and it was done. But when He came to adopt us it would come at the cost of life and blood. Oh the lavish love of God toward us.

***But there is more***. In human terms we can adopt a child, give him our name, make him part of our family and even include him in the inheritance. But we can’t get inside him and change his personality and nature. He still has that from his biological parents.

***But with God it is different***. He not only adopts us but He gets inside us and changes our old nature and imparts some of His nature in us to the point we begin to bear a family resemblance with God.

**I John 3:9** No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

**I John 3:2, what we will be.**

***Get this, it gets better***. Not only are we adopted, not only are we heirs of a great inheritance, but there is more. We are not now what we will be. The blessings we have now are not all there is.

We are in a situation much like a child in the womb. He cannot even begin to imagine what life is like on the other side. There are the slightest of hints, but nothing that can give the real picture. Like the song says, we can only imagine what we will be.

**I Corinthians 2:9** “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”

The full glory of our adoption and sonship is veiled from our eyes. Now we walk by faith and live by hope. Right now all creation groans as it awaits that day.

Only a few have been given a glimpse, Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, Paul in a vision and John in a revelation.

When Jesus appears then we shall see Him and we shall become like Him. On that day our corrupted bodies will be raised incorruptible, our depraved hearts will be made pure, our rebellious wills will bend in perfect obedience, and we will be filled with life, light, purity and righteousness.

**Colossians 3:4** When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

**Philippians 3:21** who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Seeing Jesus changes everything in this life and in the next. Seeing Jesus will be a profoundly transforming experience.

**Implications and application.**

“How great is the 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.”

John says that his purpose in writing this letter is so that our joy may be full. My purpose in preaching is so that our joy may be full. In this life there will always be trials and troubles. But the witness of the Scriptures is that God has already in this life lavished on us His greatest gifts. The Holy Spirit is the down payment, the deposit, the earnest money guaranteeing what more is to come. Though we are here on earth, we can already enjoy to the fullest a personal family-like Father-son and Father-daughter relationship with God.

***I want your joy to be full***. And the hope for that does not exist in this world. It is not found in anything made or acquired with human hands. Every earthly joy is temporal and fleeting. It will fail you. The fullness of joy is in the Holy Spirit and in being a child of God. I urge you to pursue this joy with all the fervor of your soul. Seek a relationship with your heavenly Father that is filled with affection and leaks out in your language and prayers.

**Prayer:**

This is my prayer for you from Ephesians 3:16ff:

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power [through his Spirit in your inner being], together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.