

THE INCOMPARABLE LOVE OF GOD

1 John 3:1-3

Intro: We come this morning to what could very easily be called, the most delightful three verses in the epistle. Their importance is emphasized by the word, “Behold” – the only time the Apostle John used this word in the epistle.

It calls attention to what we are about to read. He did not want a single reader to miss what he was about to say. And it seems that it must have been provoked in his mind because of the last verse of chapter 2, verse 29. And this is the first of a series of six other verses in the latter part of 1 John where the Apostle used the expression, “born of God.” See 3:9 (2x); 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18. Along with this we have the word that the Apostle John used to express “children,” which speaks of one who is born into a family, not “sons” as it is translated in the KJV. A child is one who is born into a family, not a child by adoption, and it includes both male and female children.

This was the teaching that the Lord Jesus gave to Nicodemus when He told Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” And the word that our Lord used for “again,” meant *from above*. *This is the only way that a person can become a child of God; it is by a spiritual life*. Becoming a child of God is not something that we do for ourselves, but it is what God does for us. Salvation is a work of God. It is a new life. It is eternal life. Later on in the epistle, toward the end of it, in chapter 5, verses 11 and 12, the Apostle John said this:

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life (1 John 5:11-12).

And that is what the Apostle John had in mind when he wrote that last verse of chapter 2. (Read it again.) Actually God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit, all have a part in the salvation of every person who is truly saved. And so it is absolutely true that we are born of God. We receive a new life. That is why, if our Father is righteous, and He is, then we too are going to live a life that is pleasing to Him. We are not perfect yet, but we are on the way as we will learn in our text for this morning.

So, when you read 1 John 3:1, read it this way: “Behold, what manner of

love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God.”

And when you read verse 2, read it this way: “Behold, now are we the children of God, and . . .” We are *born ones*, we are *born of God*. We are not adopted into God’s family; we are born into His family by a spiritual birth. We belong to God’s family. We are in His family.

Now this is tremendous truth, and the more we think about it, the more amazing it becomes. It is no wonder that the Apostle John declared this by saying, “Behold”!

When we think of Who God is, or Who Jesus Christ is, and then we look at the contrast when we look at ourselves, we are forced to say with the writer of that old Gospel song which says,

I stand in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene,

And wonder how He could love me, a sinner condemned, unclean!

It was while we were yet sinners, that Christ died for us. That is what we learn from Romans 5:8. Even as we are now in our saved condition, we still have to realize that we fail the Lord continually. But do you think for a moment that our sin as believers has been a surprise to God? No, He is not surprised. He saved us knowing that He was not getting a bargain. After Job had been through all his suffering, do you remember what he said to God? You will find this in Job 42:5-6 where it is recorded that he said,

5 I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

6 Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

The Apostle Paul had the same thing to say about himself. You find these words in Romans 7:18 where he wrote, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing . . .”

You and I who are saved do not deserve in any way the forgiveness of our sins, and the gift of eternal life. It is all according to Ephesians 2: 8 and 9.

But when did God start to love us? Was it after we were born? Jeremiah had this to say about God’s love for His people. His words are recorded in Jeremiah 31:3, spoken of the redeemed in Israel, but applying equally to all of us who know the Lord today. Listen to these amazing words:

3 The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

Again Paul, writing to the believers at Ephesus, said, “According as He hath chosen us in Him (in Christ) before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him” (Eph. 1:4). The Lord Jesus Himself said, and it is recorded for us in John 6:44, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him, and I will raise Him up at the last day.” Again I am reminded of one of the hymns we often sing,

O the love that sought me, O the blood that bought me,
O the grace that brought me to the fold,
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold.

The more we understand of the love of God, and the longer we know ourselves and our sin, the more we realize that the Apostle John raised a point in speaking of the Father and us, that there simply is no way we can explain why God would love us, and send His Son to die for us, that we might be forgiven of our sins, and brought into His family. When God brought us into His family, He made Himself responsible to take care of us, to lead us, to protect us, to supply all of our needs, and to see that we get safely home to heaven.

O the love that drew salvation’s plan,
O the grace that brought it down to man;
O the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary.

I have fallen far short of doing justice to the love of God, but I trust that the Holy Spirit will enable us to see that regardless of where we look in any generation, whether we look in heaven, or throughout the earth, there is no love that can begin to compare with the love that God has for us, His people, in His family. May the way we love each other reflect God’s love for us all. We all need to think about God’s love more and more until we see how truly incomparable God’s love is for you and for me.

But now let us go on to verse 2.

How appropriate it was for the Apostle John, addressing himself to the family of God, to call them, “Beloved.” That is what we are, beloved, the beloved of God. So we need to treat each other with the love of God

which He has shed abroad in our hearts.

This is a good word: “Now are we the children of God.” We aren’t brought into the family of God after a period of some kind of probation. We don’t have to wait until we die. “N-O-W, Now are we the children of God. You still will be when you die. When we are saved one of the many things that happens to us, is that we immediately become family! But a part of being in the family of God, is that God predetermined that we are going to take on the family resemblance. The Lord did not save us to let us remain the same, but He saved us, and He is changing us. And what our heavenly Father is doing to us, and for us, and in us, is so wonderful that we can’t fully understand it. But there are two things that we know.

We know, first of all, that the Lord Jesus is coming back. It probably was some thirty to forty years before this that John had heard the Lord promise that He was coming back. And the Apostle Peter, who also was present when the Lord ascended back to heaven, said in 1 Peter 1:8 spoke of “the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, ye love; in Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” None of us has ever seen Christ like the Apostle John did, and like the Apostle Peter did, as well as all of the other apostles. They heard Him say that He was coming back, and they believed His promise. We see God and the Lord Jesus Christ, not face to face, but as They were pleased to reveal Themselves in the Word. Now when John wrote his epistle, the Lord still had not returned, but John believed that He would. And the second wonderful truth that Peter and John both knew was that when we all see Him when He comes, “we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.”

These are still two events which have to take place, one, that the Lord is going to return, and, second, that when He does, suddenly His work of salvation will be completed in us, and we shall be like Him. The Apostle Paul said it this way in Romans 8:29-30:

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

This takes in the whole scope of salvation, and our future glorification is

spoken of as though it had already taken place because it is absolutely certain that it will happen to every child of God, every member of the family of God.

And now we come to the last verse of our text, verse 3.

Now the question needs to be raised. In verse 1 we learned about the incomparable love of Christ for us, which is the foundation of our salvation. In verse 2 we learn about our present state in the family of God, and the prospect of every child of God. Now in verse 3, the Apostle John, in effect, asks and answers a very important question, Is there anything for us to do while we await the return of our Lord? And the answer is, Yes! We are to purify ourselves, and the pattern of our purification is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. God has saved us to make us like His Son. And there are certain things we are to do in anticipation of what God will do when at last we see His Son.

The coming of the Lord is called our hope, not with any idea of uncertainty about it, but because it is the guaranteed plan and purpose of God as the goal of our salvation.

To purify is to cleanse. Sin has defiled us. Sin continues to defile us. And we daily need cleansing from the effects that sin has in our lives. The Word of God has a cleansing effect upon us, even from just reading it every day, and seeking God's grace to obey it. As I pray for my family, and as I pray for you, I ask the Lord that the first thought that comes to you and to me each day when we get up, is that we must get to our Bible reading before we get caught up in the activities of the day.

When the Lord Jesus was with His disciples for the last time before His arrest and crucifixion, first in the Upper Room, and then on their way to Gethsemane, He said to them according to John 15:3, "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you." The Word is a living Word, and it is powerful. The Psalmist said in Psalm 119:11, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee." The Lord illustrated this when He washed the disciples' feet. The Word and prayer are two of our strongest weapons against sin.

In the first chapter of 1 John we read about the cleansing power of the blood of Christ in verse 7: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ

cleanseth us from all sin.”

When we were learning about the world in 1 John 2:15-17, I read to you from two other passages in which we learn about the world, and are warned against it. One of those was 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. The last verse, 7:1 tells us this:

7 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

In the words which Dr. Jerry Bridges uses often when he is with us, we cleanse ourselves by pursuing holiness. Even what we are doing this morning, we have met together to hear the Word of God which the Spirit of God uses for our cleansing.

Concl: So there is much that we need to do, and can do, with the help of the Holy Spirit to keep ourselves clean, or to cleanse ourselves when we have sinned to pursue holiness. To purify is to sanctify. And so that we do to grow in the Lord and to do His will, has a cleansing effect upon us. But we don't do this in our own strength. We read the Word. We pray. We obey the Lord. And we seek the fellowship of the Lord's people. All of these things the Lord uses in our lives to cleanse us when we have sinned, and to keep us from sinning when we walk in fellowship with the Lord. Let us dwell much on the love of God, knowing why the Lord has saved us, and then seeking the purifying power of the Word of God day after day. There is much for us to do every day.