

1 John 2:28-3:10

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[0 : 00] Who am I? has got to be one of life's big existential questions. Who am I? And a variant of that question, I imagine less commonly posed, is who or what are we? What are we?

Or making it a little more specific, what are we as Christians? Now, some might reply, poor, deluded souls. Well, John, in his letter, gives us an answer to that question, who are we or what are we as Christians? He declares with real intensity and palpable excitement. And that is what we are. And that is what we are. Okay, but what is that? Well, it's clear.

We are children of God. 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. We are sons and daughters of God. God is our Father. That is what we are. And I want to spend a little time this morning on this Father's Day morning exploring and enjoying this reality as we consider what John says about us as children of God. And we can organize what we want to present and focus on under four headings that describe John as he writes the words of our passage. John is, and I trust we are, first of all, overwhelmed by the Father's love. That's what we are going to look at, first of all, in these verses, verses 1 to 3 of 1 John chapter 3. And the first thing we notice is that John is overwhelmed by the Father's love. But secondly, we will notice that he is thrilled by our status as children of God. And then we will move on and notice how John is also, and I trust we also, in being excited by what awaits us as children of God. And then finally, challenged to live as children of God. So, these four headings that I think allow us to consider what John is saying in these verses. Overwhelmed by the Father's love, thrilled by our status as children of God. Excited by what awaits us as children of God, and challenged to live as children of God. First of all, then, overwhelmed by the Father's love. The language that John uses in these verses is the language of one who is overwhelmed, one who is awestruck, one who is bowled over by a consideration and by His experience of the Father's love. And we must, and we want to hear and echo the words and sentiments of John. But first, we need to notice the evidence that he provides that justifies his superlatives. We can't immediately go to the superlatives, though we're tempted to do so. We want to, first of all, establish, well, what is the evidence that he supplies that would justify the language that he uses? Having done that, we'll then move on to consider the superlatives. So, what we want to do as we're considering this matter of John overwhelmed by the Father's love is to notice briefly the evidence that he supplies, the evidence of the Father's love, and then to move on to consider the extravagance of the Father's love. First of all, then, the evidence of the Father's love. On what grounds does John wax lyrical about the Father's love? What evidence does he supply to establish the Father's love for us? Well, it's not really a very difficult question to answer. The clue is in the word Father, that we should be called the children of God. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. This is the evidence. This is what justifies the astonishment. This is what justifies the superlatives, that we, even we, should be called the children of God. This reality or this God-given status that we enjoy is the evidence is the evidence of the Father's love, evidence of the greatness or the magnitude of

the Father's love, that we, you and me, as believers, should be called children of God. This is the evidence. This is what justifies the language that John uses. So, having established that, let's move on and think about the extravagance of the Father's love that John celebrates in these verses. You see, the evidence that he sees and that he experiences compels John to reflect on and celebrate and invite others to discover this great love of the Father. And in just a few words in that first verse, he does so very powerfully. The verse begins with a call to his readers and to us to look or to behold. Now, that's lost somewhat in the translation that we are using where we read, how great is the love of the Father. There is a word at the very beginning of that verse that's captured in the older versions and in some of the songs that have been penned or arranged around this verse. Behold, behold what manner of love the Father has shown unto us. And there is this word here that John is using. He is saying, look, behold, consider, consider this love. John is saying to us, even this morning, he's saying, just pause for a moment. Stand back. Stop what you're doing.

And look, look, look, and consider, and be amazed. Be overwhelmed by the Father's love. And even this morning, this is an opportunity to do so. Will you, will you this morning, as we begin this sermon, will you just pause for a moment and look and behold and enjoy and celebrate with John this great love that you are the object of? Well, John begins with this call to us to look, to behold, to consider. But John goes on to comment in this same verse on both the nature of this extravagant love and our experience of it. I think we can distinguish these two elements so there's considerable overlap. The nature of this extravagant love and our experience of it. Firstly, the nature of the Father's extravagant love. The words that we read there in verse 1, the words that are translated, how great is the love of the Father, especially that first part of the sentence, how great. These words translate a very curious Greek word that is also translated, and some of you more familiar with an older version will be very familiar with this. They're also translated by the phrase, what manner of? What manner of? And the word itself originally meant something along the lines of, of what country? Now, that may sound quite strange. What has that got to do with anything, of what country? Well, the idea is that it's a word that expresses surprise and wonder at encountering something foreign. It's a word you would use when you see something that's just out of the ordinary, that's unexpected, something you're not familiar with. What manner of? What is this?

[8 : 34] Where does this come from? That's the idea that John is getting across, this love. Where does it come from? Where could we ever imagine that we would experience such love? Where does it come from?

The disciples used the same word, and I think this is very helpful in getting the flavor of it. They used the same word speaking of Jesus in Matthew chapter 8 and verse 27, when Jesus calmed the storm. You remember the occasion there, they were in the boat and the waves and the wind, and Jesus orders that all be calm and all is calm. And there, what do we read? What do the disciples say among themselves in the light of this? What do they say? They say this, what kind of man is this?

What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him. It's the same word. And John here, who was part of that group of disciples expressing that amazement, he says, what kind of love is this?

I hope you get the idea. John is overwhelmed by the Father's love, a love that is altogether unexpected and incomparable. The Father's love is in a different category to anything we have or ever will experience elsewhere. John, as we just noted, with the disciples, cried out, what kind of man is this?

And now, decades later, he cries out in pen, what kind of love is this? This love, the Father's love, is of a different order altogether beyond measure and beyond compare. The psalmist expressed something of this sense of wonder when he penned the words that we read in Psalm 8 and verses 3 and 4.

[10 : 29] When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? What kind of love is this that God should not only be mindful of and care for, but love and welcome into his family the likes of us. What kind of love is this? And so, in the language that John uses, he touches on, he speaks of the nature of this love, that it is of a different order, of a different category, unexpected beyond measure and beyond compare. It's very important for us to grasp this for our own spiritual health and well-being, but how important for us to grasp this as we would share this good news with others.

You see, we live in a day when we say, well, nobody's interested in the gospel, nobody's interested in in the Bible and Jesus. But you see, they've never experienced this kind of love. If they were only to see, if they were only to experience this kind of love, there is not a man or woman in Aberdeen who would not with John say, what kind of love is this? But they've never seen it. They've never experienced it. And so, they do not cry out with John in this way. So, John here touches on the nature of this extravagant love, but he also touches on or references our experience of the Father's extravagant love. You see, John says, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us. John speaks of this love as lavished on us. The word he uses can mean simply given, is what it means. But I think the sense of what John is getting across is better captured by this word lavished. Behold what manner of love, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us. This is our experience of His love as He draws us to Himself, as He adopts us into His family, as He forgives our sins, as He deals gently and graciously and generously with us. Our experience of the Father's love with John is of a love that is extravagant, a love that is rich. Our Father so loves. That is how He loves. He so loves.

In this passage, then, John declares the extravagance of the Father's love. He's overwhelmed by the extravagance of the Father's love. But one thing we need to do just briefly before moving on to the next thing we want to say is we have to recognize that to appreciate the magnitude of this extravagant love that John declares to be so, but to appreciate the magnitude of it, we need to appreciate what the Father has done to secure our status as His children.

And there is so much that could be said in that regard, but I limit myself to one thing that the Apostle Paul states when he speaks on this matter clearly and concisely in his letter to the Galatians and in chapter 4 and verses 4 and 5. We read, And then what does he say? That we might receive the full rights of sons. This is what the Father did in order to secure our status as sons and daughters. This speaks to the magnitude of this love, extravagant love that cost the giving of His own Son. The Father secures our status as sons and daughters by the sending of His own Son, Jesus, to redeem us. And Jesus does this by dying on the cross in our place, taking the penalty of our sin, and so making possible and securing our adoption into the family of God.

With the hymn writer we can say, How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.

[15 : 12] So John is overwhelmed by the extravagance of the Father's love. But also, and more briefly, we move on and notice that John is thrilled by his and our status as children of God. We come back to where we began. What are we? And this is what we are, says John. We are the children of God. We are the sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. But let's notice more carefully what John says in these verses concerning our current status as children of God. There are three things that he says.

There are only three things that I want to notice. First of all, he says, We are called children of God. Just thinking a little bit more about the language he uses there. We are called children of God.

By whom, rather begs the question, who calls us children of God? Well, it's God Himself. He is the one who so designates us. He is the one who calls us His children. This is not some self-generated delusion. That's what many people would imagine. When they hear Christians praying to God as Father, they smile politely and say, Well, isn't that nice? Isn't that nice? Isn't it nice how they delude themselves into thinking that as they pray into the ceiling, there's a Father up there who knows them and who's interested in them? This is just some self-generated delusion. This is some nice idea that they've inherited from their fathers or their grandfathers, but it's just clearly it's not so.

Well, that is what many people may think. But the one who calls us children of God is God Himself. He is the one who so designates us as His children. We are called children of God. But then also notice how at the beginning of verse 2, John says, Dear friends, now we are children of God. With a real focus and an emphasis on the word now, now we are children of God. You see, John is going to go on to speak of what awaits us as children of God. But to avoid any semblance of doubt, he clarifies that our status as children of God is a current status. Now we are children of God. And though John does not develop in these verses the implications of this, they are, of course, many and wonderful. We are loved as children of God now. We are members of His family now. We enjoy Jesus as our elder brother now.

We are cared for and nurtured as children now. We are heirs of our Father God now. And we could go on now, says John. Now we are children of God. But he says a third thing about our current status as children of God. Something a little bit more intriguing, less encouraging at first sight.

[18:18] He says, The world does not know us. The world does not know us. That is what we are. And then he says, The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. What we are, sons and daughters of God, though thrilling, is not visible or understood by the world. John does not want this to be a cause of discouragement or even doubt for the believers he is writing to. And so he explains to them and he explains to us that in being unrecognized as the children of God, we are in exalted company.

He goes, So it was with Jesus. The world does not know us. The world does not recognize us as the children of God. And that is how it was with Jesus. The world did not know Him. And so we ought not to be surprised and we ought not to be discouraged if we also experience the same lack of recognition.

So there are three things that John says about our current status. He's thrilled by our current status as children of God. Are you? Are you thrilled by your status as a child of God? Maybe a more fundamental question that needs to be posed to some this morning is this, are you a child of God? You would have no reason to be thrilled if you're not a child of God. We've seen what the Father has done to secure our status in the passage that we read in Galatians or the verse that we read from Galatians, how the Father sent His own Son to redeem us. That's what the Father has done. But having secured our status, having taken the initiative in sending His Son, how do we actually become children of God?

The word translated there in verse 3, children, that we're focusing on, we're children of God. This word, children, is a word that's derived from a verb that means to bear, as in to give birth, to bear.

And that gives us an insight into what is involved in becoming a child of God. We need to be born. We need to be born anew. We need to be born again. We need to be born of God. Notice what John has just said in verse 29. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him. This is how we become sons and daughters of God, when we are born of God.

[21 : 12] Indeed, in this very same letter in chapter 5, notice how John begins that final chapter. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And so the question for you this morning is this, do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah and Savior of the world? Do you believe that He came and died to redeem you? Are you trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If you are, then you are born of God.

So John is overwhelmed by the extravagance of God. He's thrilled by his and our status as the children of God, but he's also excited by what awaits us as children of God. Notice there in verse 2 and in the second half of the verse, but, or let's read the whole verse, dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. John is looking forward. He's looking forward to what awaits us as the children of God. John is recognizing that while we are sons and daughters of God now, He has made that so explicit, now we are children of God, He recognizes that though that is so, there is also a future aspect. We are not yet all that God would have us be. God's ultimate purpose for us is expounded by Paul as he writes to the Romans. Let's just notice what he says in Romans chapter 8 from verse 28, and focusing on one particular thing that he says there, but we'll read the three verses. Romans chapter 8 from verse 28, and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew, He also predestined, and then notice, to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that we might be the firstborn among many brothers, very especially this central element to God's purpose in redeeming us, that we would be conformed to the likeness of His Son. Now, this is a work that has begun. This is a work that is in progress in every believer, being conformed to the likeness of Jesus. We are already children of God.

We are already brothers and sisters of Jesus, and we are already being made more and more like Jesus. Again, listen to what Paul says as he writes to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and in verse 18.

2 Corinthians chapter 3 and in verse 18.

Notice there, Paul says that this is something that is happening now. We are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory. This work has begun.

[25 : 04] But though it has begun and though it is ongoing, it is a work of God that awaits future consummation or completion. And when will this be? Well, John tells us when it will be. He tells us in this passage, when He, when Jesus appears.

When Jesus appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. John is looking forward to the great day when Jesus will return and we will see Him face to face.

At that moment, the process that began when we were first adopted into God's family will come to its fulfillment. And the image of God in His children will be fully restored and we will be like Jesus.

How will this happen? How will this happen? Well, we don't really know how it will happen, but what is suggested by John's words in this passage is that the very act of seeing Jesus face to face is in itself in some way transformative.

But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. The very moment, the very act of seeing Jesus, John suggests, is involved or is instrumental in this transformation that will take place in us.

[26 : 33] And John is excited by this. He is excited by what awaits us as children of God. But finally, we can also say that John is challenged to live as a child of God.

And we, too, with John, are challenged to live as children of God. And this we draw from verse 3. Having declared all that he's declared and that we've given some thought to, John continues, And he's been speaking of Jesus, and so he's speaking here also of Jesus.

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as Jesus is pure. It is good to be overwhelmed by the Father's love.

It's right to be thrilled by our status as children of God. We have good reason to be excited by what awaits us as children of God. But we must also, with John, be challenged to live as sons and daughters of God now.

And this is what John is stressing in this verse. We are to purify ourselves. We are to cast away sin. We are to fight temptation.

[27 : 56] We are to examine ourselves. And when we see that there are matters in our heart and in our life and in our conversation that are not pure, that are not pleasing to God, we are, with his help, to purify ourselves.

What does Jesus present? Or, sorry, what does John present as our motivation to purify ourselves? Is it that we might be accepted by God? No, we already are accepted by God.

We're his children. Is it that we will earn his favor if we purify ourselves? We already enjoy his favor. We are his sons and daughters. No, our motivation to purify ourselves, we might say, is twofold.

Who we are and the hope we have. Who we are. We are the children of God. And as our elder brother is pure, as John stresses in this verse, notice that he declares Jesus to be pure.

No talk of Jesus purifying himself. There isn't a direct symmetry in that regard. We purify ourselves because he is pure. And we are to bear the family likeness because of who we are.

[29 : 04] We are sons and daughters of God. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus. As he is pure, so we are to be pure. Who we are. Our identity is a motivator to purify ourselves.

That we might behave in a manner that reflects and reveals who we are. But there's also, and it's very much tied in as a motivator, what John says here about this hope.

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself. This hope that on the great day, on that great day, we will be like Jesus.

But we don't just wait passively for that day to come. Our desire is to become ever more like Jesus now. And so, we purify ourselves.

Day by day, step by step, sin by sin, We engage in this task, in this work, in this mission of purifying ourselves just as he is pure.

[30 : 06] Who is this challenge for? Well, John is clear. Everyone who has this hope. If you have this hope, if you have this hope that as a son or daughter of God, when Jesus returns, you will see him face to face and you will be like him.

If this is your hope, then you are to purify yourself. Well, on this Father's Day, may we all know what it is to be overwhelmed by the Father's love.

May we know what it is to be thrilled by our status as children of God, excited by what awaits us, and challenged to live today as sons and daughters of our loving Heavenly Father.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do pray that we would indeed know something of John's sense of wonder and awe as he considered how great your love for him and for all of your children.

Help us as we ponder on your truth, as we live as sons and daughters of God, as we experience your care and love for us. Help us to grow in our sense of wonder at your love.

[31 : 31] Lord, we thank you for our privilege status as sons and daughters, as your sons and daughters. And we thank you for what awaits us, that we have this hope, that we can look forward to this day that is coming, this day that has been set, when Jesus will return and we will see Jesus face to face, and we will be like him.

And we pray that in the time that remains for us in this world, that we would take on this challenge that is laid before us as sons and daughters of God, to purify ourselves, to live lives that reveal our identity, that reflect something of the holiness and purity and perfection of Jesus.

We will only ever in this life reflect it very inadequately. But we pray that as we purify ourselves, so we might reflect it more clearly, less unclearly in the lives that we live.

And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's close our service this morning by singing again.

And we began our service by singing the first 11 verses of Psalm 103, and we'll close by finishing, or by singing from verse 12 through to the end.

[32 : 56] You'll find that on page 135. Psalm 103, on page 135, we'll sing from verse 12 through to the end of the psalm, we'll sing to the tune before the throne.

As far as east is from the west, so far his love is borne away. Our many sins and trespasses, and all the guilt that on us lay. Just as a father loves his child, so God loves those who feed his name.

For he remembers we are dust, and well he knows our feeble frame. Let's stand to sing these verses. Amen. So far as east is from the west, so far his love has borne away, our many sins and trespasses, Let us pray.

Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

[35 : 03] Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

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Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Let us pray. And you, my soul, O praise the Lord.

[36 : 05] And you, my soul, O praise the Lord. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always.

Amen.