

I am a child of God * 1 John 3:1-3, etc.

January 30, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

You know on TV shows how sometimes there'll be a voiceover at the beginning of the show that says 'Last week on (whatever the show is called)' and then they give a recap of what happened? Well, we need to do that this morning because what we're going to talk about today flows very naturally out of last week.

So, 'Last week on Langford Church Live,' we answered the question 'Who are you?' like this – I am a sinner, saved by grace. Even when we were dead in sin, God forgave us and gave us a new life, all by faith in Him. We were sinners but we have been saved by grace.

That's not the end of the story though, because God didn't just save us by grace and then wash His hands of us. He didn't just get us out of trouble and leave us to fend for ourselves.

No, God delivered us from sin and then adopted us into His family. God didn't just get us out of jail; He got us out of jail and then said 'Come, be my precious child. I will take responsibility for your eternal wellbeing.' We are not just sinners saved by grace; we are sinners saved by grace and we have become the children of God.

One of the clearest expressions of this is found at the very beginning of John's Gospel. Turn with me to John 1, verse 12. As you're turning there - John 1 is this introduction to who Jesus is; remember 'Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing' from Christmas time? John 1 explains how Jesus came into the world that He had made, but verse 11 – 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. By and large, the people of Israel, Jesus' own people, didn't realize who He was and just shunted Him aside -

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who **believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:9-13 NIV).

When we **believe** in Jesus, we are not just forgiven and saved by grace (as Ephesians 2 says); John 1 tells us that when we believe, we are adopted into God's own family. We are born again, not by human effort or will, but by the power of God.

Now that's a really striking reality – that we could go from being dead in sin, enemies of God, to sitting at His Table as a member of His own royal family. This is a real 'rags' to 'riches' situation.

It's a bit like Nelson Mandela's story. When he was young, he lived in relative poverty. His father had been a minor tribal official but he lost his authority when he ran afoul of a white colonial governor. So Mandela grew up in humble circumstances, in a little hut way out in the South African countryside. The floor was made of crushed ant hill pieces that they kept smooth by smearing cow dung on it and they gathered all of their water by hand (*A long walk to freedom*, 7-8).ⁱ It was a happy life but a humble one.

And then one day, when he was nine, his father died of lung cancer and Mandela's prospects looked bleak. It sure looked like he would live out his days in humble obscurity.

But then, not long after his father's death, his tribal chief invited him to live at his palace in the provisional capital and to become one of his children (*A long walk*, 16). He would receive all of the benefits and status and privilege that were given to the king's children as he himself became a child of the king (*A long walk*, 17). He went from the middle of nowhere to the centre of the action, all because the chief graciously offered to take him into His family and to give to him all of the benefits that came along with the family name. And that's what God does for us. God take us out of obscurity and sin and gives us all the blessings befitting a child of the King.

And John expresses the wonder of it over in 1 John. 1 John 3, verse 1. Flip over to there; towards the back of your Bible, after Hebrews but before Revelation – 1 John 3:1 - 1 John 3:1 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 Living Bible translation that I came to faith with puts it like this – 'See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children-think of it-and we really *are!*'

It's like John can't quite wrap his mind around this, that the God of the universe should reach into our lives to make us His own children, but that's exactly what He has done. I will forever have this image in my mind of an older saint at our church in Kingston, a guy kind of like Dick Archer, saying 'When I make a peanut butter sandwich, I lavish the peanut butter on it. Not just a little layer; I pile it on – that's how God has lavished His love on us – that we who were estranged from Him could become children of God.

If you have put your faith in Jesus, trusting Him in all things, then you are a beloved child of God. He has lavished His love on you. If you have kids, think about how much they mean to you, the lengths to which you'd be willing to go to see them thrive; that's how God feels about you.

Now, John continues in verse 2 – (first John 3, verse 2) 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known - the implication being that being a child of God means something for us both NOW AND for the future. So let's think about this for a minute; what does it mean for us NOW for us to be children of God? And then, what will it mean in the future?

Let's unpack those.

NOW, it means that we have a Father who loves us. Remember the big 'but' in Ephesians 2 – we were dead in sin, but because of His love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ. We have a Father who went to incredible lengths to save us, all because of His fundamental commitment to us. Earlier in Ephesians (1:4-5), Paul says: 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will (Eph 1:4-5 NIV).

God chose you to be His child because He loves you; not because He feels sorry for you; not because He'll get a tax receipt for it. God chose to make you His child because He is deeply, fundamentally committed to you in love. As children of God, we have a Father who loves us.

As children of God, we also have a Father who listens to us. When we pray, He hears us, and He delights to give good gifts to His children.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes this analogy - 9 "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? (No, that's silly; if your child asks for something, you are going to give them something that benefits them).

11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Mat 7:9-11 NIV).

We have a direct line to our Father; when we need help, when we need grace, when we need strength, when we need courage, when we need direction, we can pray to the Father the way a child speaks to their parent and He hears us. As children of God, we have a Father who listens to us.

And as children of God, we have a Father who provides for us. Again, Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that when we pray, '[our] Father knows what [we] need before you ask him' (Mat 6:8 NIV). That's Matthew 6:8; just a few verses later, He reminds us that 'Our Heavenly Father know what we need and when we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteous, all these things will be given to us too.'

As children of God, we have a Father who provides for us.

We have a Father who loves us, who listens to us and who provides for us; that's what being a child of God means now; but being a child of God also means something for the future. As children of God, we have an eternal inheritance.

Romans 8:14 for example says – "...those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." [We can call out to God in the most intimate of ways.]

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Rom 8:13-17 NIV).

Yes, being a child of God may cause friction in this life, especially from people who don't know God, but we have an eternal inheritance to make up for it; the eternal weight of glory that makes these present troubles look like momentary light afflictions. We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, promised, guaranteed eternal glory as sons and daughters of God.

The opening verses of 1 Peter make that point - 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you,

5 who through faith are shielded by God's power...

As children of God, we are heirs to an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade, and God Himself is preserving both it and us so that we will share in that inheritance in the end.

What is that inheritance like? Well, certainly glory is a part of it. 1 John 3:2 actually says 'when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall all see Him as He is' – radiant and resplendent and perfect. We will be like God!

And our inheritance is long term. Hebrews 9:15 says (paraphrase) This is why Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.ⁱⁱ This is no temporary thing. This is eternity we're talking about.

And Revelation 21:4 paints a picture of it - '4 God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' And then God says in – verse 7 - He who overcomes [in this life] will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son (Rev 21:4-7 NIV).

As children of God, we are heirs to an eternal inheritance, where sorrow and pain and disability are gone, where glory is the order of the day, and where we will be like God in all His perfection and goodness.

You are a child of God with an eternal inheritance.

Now let's pause here for a minute to think about this. This is true. This is what the Bible says to be true. Do you believe it? Do you live like it? Think for a minute.

If you stop and think about 'who you are?' what is it that makes you you? Is it your job? Your career? Your marital status? Your looks? They can all fail and they won't last forever.

But this is something that you build your life on.

You are a child of God with a Father who loves you and listens to you and provides for you. Depend on Him. Let Him define your worth in this world. Not what other people think. Not the way you appear on social media. Not who you are in your darkest hours when Satan condemns you.

No, you are a precious child of God; your Father is the sovereign Creator of all things and He delights in you. Let that shape your self-image, your answer to the question – Who are you? I am a child of God, loved by God, with an eternal inheritance.

Now if you're there, if you're living in light of this reality, then let's think about what this means in our everyday lives. Because I was really interested to realize this week that almost every passage that talked about being children of God, also addressed how we live as children of God. And it makes sense, right? Apples don't fall far from trees. I will never be able to pass off as not my father's son because – family resemblance right? When people look at us, our actions and demeanour should make them say 'He looks just like His Father.'

As children of God, we should resemble our Father.

That's why John says in 1 John 3:2 - 2 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.

3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

That's why a few verses later – 1 John 3:9 – he says - 9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

That's why Paul says in Romans 8:14 - those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

When people look at us, we want them to say ‘they look just like their father.’

We are children of God, with an eternal inheritance, and a loving Father to emulate.

BENEDICTION

2 Th. 2:16-17 - Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

ⁱ Nelson Mandela, *A long walk to freedom: the autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, (Back Bay Books), 1995.

ⁱⁱ 15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Heb 9:15 NIV).

ⁱⁱⁱ All Scripture references: 1 John 1:11-13, 1 John 3:1-3, Ephesians 1:4-5, Matthew 7:9-11, Matthew 6:8, 6:32-33, Romans 8:13-17, 1 Peter 1:4-5, Revelation 21:4-7, 1 John 3:2, 1 John 3:9, Romans 8:14.