

“Real Jesus for Real Childlikeness”

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1 John 2:28-3:10

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Last week we looked at the power to persevere when life exceedingly difficult. We persevere by abiding: in the message of the gospel of life, in the truth, and in the work of the Spirit to preserve us.

After discussing the appearing of antichrist last week, John now in v. 28 brings us back to another appearing, that of Jesus. He shall return, and John calls us to abide in him so we don't shrink in shame when he appears, that is, not cower out of fear that we may not be received, may not “be enough.” We may not want to think about it, but every one of us know in the depth of our hearts that shame John talks about. What if I'm not good enough? Shame is different from guilt. Guilt says, I did something bad; I made a mistake. Shame says: I am bad, I am a mistake. I'll never be enough to get it all done and never let them see me weak. Shame is what drives us to hide and hope no one ever sees what we did when no one was looking and drives us to lie to make sure no one sees us clearly. It is that feeling when a one feels that pressure to be it all, do it all and do it perfectly. And look really good doing it. When someone feels when you finally made it to senior leadership in your job and dad still doesn't pay attention to you. I'll NEVER be enough. That's shame.

We often feel the same way about God. What if God sees me and says I never knew you? What if I'm not enough for God, not good enough, not disciplined enough, not bold enough, not tender enough. All that weight of God appearing and my feeling like he's going to see me for who I am and then turn away. That shame, desire to hide, so often drives our behavior. So where might our confidence come from? How might we not shrink away in shame? We have a Father. A Father who knows us and loves us. John answers: Like Father like Son. That childlikeness before a Father who deeply loves us changes life.

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

³ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 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. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

A few of you may have heard me tell you a story, long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away about my conversation with my dad just before my first big date where I drove the car. I don't remember who I took, but I do remember like yesterday what my dad said.

As I was getting ready to leave, I noticed dad followed me out to the car, because he obviously had a speech ready. I braced; what could he possibly want to tell me? Don't crash the car. No drinking. Respect this young lady. Any number of things. But his speech was just four words and he turned to go back inside. Just four that I have never forgotten. Dad said: Remember who you are. That's it. Remember who you are.

I think every other thing he could have wanted to say were included in those four little words. All they had taught me were rolled up in that speech. Why? Because as human beings, our identity drives our behavior. Identity produces behavior. Who we see ourselves to be drives how we live our lives. Remember who you are.

1. Who have we become?

3:1, we are God's children now! Why? We have been born of him, 2:29. God's seed abides in us, 3:9, and we have been born of God. Have been born is passive perfect tense, meaning something happened to us—someone else did it—and it has a continuing effect. What happened to us is God gave us the gift of re-birth! We have been born a second time, which is more than a mere exercise in intellectual assent. A supernatural event has taken place within our souls to make us new, regeneration—making a dead heart alive by his Spirit, to a new people, give us a new name of a new Father and we are being transformed into his likeness. Like Father, like Son.

How he does this involves demolition and construction. Look at v. 5, he appeared (that is Jesus took on flesh, became the God man we talked about last week) to take away sins. As John says in his Gospel, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Also in 3:8, the *reason* the Son of God appeared was to **destroy** the works of the devil. On the cross Jesus took our sin and our shame. It was nailed to the cross in his body, that Our sin and Our shame might be taken away, removed, cleansed. That our guilt is gone. He demolishes the charge of our sin against us.

And he also in his resurrection from the dead has destroyed the works of the devil, demolishing the reign of sin! He proclaims victory over the evil one in this world because the kingdom of the evil one has been defeated, destroyed. The works of the devil of defiance of the authority of God, the infliction of pain and suffering, injustice in this world, immorality, disease—all the works of the devil, Jesus came in order to destroy them! **He came to destroy everything opposed to the life giving rule and reign of God...in the world and in his children.**

John gets even more specific in vs 4-5, *where he calls sin lawlessness*. Jesus demolishes our lawlessness. The word used there for lawlessness is a specific and technical term that means something more than merely breaking God's law, his rules, as in not adhering to the 10 Commandments or something. The word is most often used for a radical rebellion, a rejection of authority of God and a claim to my own authority and autonomy. This sinning, as John labels it in v. 6-8, is the attitude that says I'll live how I want because God is not the boss of me. I'll do it my way, as Sinatra sings. Jesus has come to destroy that rebellion against God in this world, and within us. And he does it by giving us the gift of re-birth. That sort of couldn't care less about God's works and ways can't thrive in his children.

He demolishes this rebellion in us, and he constructs something, someone different. He builds his children into those who practice righteousness, 2:29, who practice righteousness as he is righteous, 3:7, children whose hope in Christ drives to purity, 3:3. Again, why? Because 3:9, his seed has taken up life within us. We are born differently, born to be and grow into someone new who lives like HIS child. **Like Father, like son and daughter.**

Let me summarize what John is teaching here, as he does in v. 10. How we live demonstrates who is your Daddy. That's what he is saying. Identity drives our behaviors. Remember who you are.

How does this help me not shrink in shame, in feeling like I'm not enough for you, or for God? Remember who you are. Because your Father sent his Son to destroy the work of the devil in us and in this world, when we see fits and starts of that transformation, of that longing for righteousness, celebrate it! Wherever you find yourself practicing righteousness where you didn't before, praise God...we are not who we once were. And that's not simply because we try harder, but because our Father is at work! **You are at the same time God's masterpiece, his beloved child AND his work in progress!** If he has saved you, his work shows up. Not in you livign as a perfectly righteous person, but in growth, in transformation, in large ways and small no longer living as the people we once were. Lawlessness is no longer our master. Life has come.

John Murray, the great Reformed theologian wrote in his book, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, we must appreciate that while sin is still present, it does not have mastery. "There is a total difference between surviving sin and reigning sin, the regenerate in conflict with sin and the unregenerate complacent with sin. It is one thing for sin to live in us; it is another for us to live in sin. It is one thing for the enemy to occupy the capital; it is another for the defeated hosts to harass the garrisons of the kingdom." (p 145).

We can take two different perspectives on life as a Christian. One is the posture of the "should". I should be more supportive. I should be more forgiving. I should be more this and less that. The should mindset is one of the critic, and when see these behaviors in ourselves or one another, we walk in shame. I'll never be enough. All this I should be. Should is a powerful tool of shame.

What John wants us to see is the “growth” perspective. Wow, I was less selfish than I have been in the past. God must be at work. By God’s grace, I was way more gracious and forgiving than I thought I could be. Must be God’s transforming work. I felt trapped in fear in that moment but I worked through it. Praise God for what he is doing in me. Or in you! Do you see the difference between the shaming critic and the celebration of growth? Look for the growth, for he who practices righteousness has been born of him!

So where do you feel free in Christ today that you did not 10 years ago, 5 years ago, one month ago? Give God thanks and take another step of hope. The seed of God is within you and it shall grow. It is like the seed of a great tree that can break through stone, burst through concrete and grow. Because God has birthed you again in his power, you can change and grow. When you see it, celebrate it. Remember who you are.

2. How do we deal with persistent sin?

John makes himself clear in vs 6, 8, 9, that sin has no place in the life of a person reborn. And yet, sin we do. Deliberately. Willfully. Back in chapter 1, he reminds us if we say we don’t sin, we are liars. So what do we do when we find it? When the enemy harasses the garrisons of our soul? When we are not living in remembrance of who we are. How do we fight it?

Look at 3:1, see, Behold, look carefully, what kind of love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called children of God. We, v. 2, are God’s children now! That word translated “what kind of” has a background of “what country” or we might say, from what planet is this kind of love! That is lavished and poured out on us. His love makes us his children!

What does a child do to make him or herself a child? Nothing. The comparison here is God has covered us up with an otherworldly love to make us his children, his beloved, NOW, knowing who we are and how we behave. His love makes us his beloved when we have been his enemies! He knows who we are and STILL adopted us and has given us his name, his power and his nature. Who loves like that? Who steps into a life of rebellion and sets his affection on that rebel to love them into a child? God does!

And it continues, v. 2, *we shall be like him*. V. 3, *everyone who hopes in him, purifies himself as he is pure*. This is like a tiny little “how to” verse in 1 John. Think with me here. This is the now effect of the future hope we have of glory. What John is saying is that when we hope in, lay hold of, meditate on, the truth of who we are in Christ, our identity as dearly loved children, then our lives begin to take on the characteristics and purity of actually LIVING like those children. That’s how holiness and purity grows. Remembering identity brings change to our behavior. Like Father, like sons and daughters. We sin when we feel like orphans; we grow when we remember our Father.

Isn’t is the quest for approval that drives us to lie, cheat, steal, lust, walk in pride...we will have all the honor and glory we could possibly want in Christ, we already have it. When we know we already have what we most desire, the temptation of grasping for it is not as powerful. You want approval, to be seen and known without cowering in shame? You already have it in Christ. And if we live with the joy of his love and approval, we grow in purity!

One day we shall be like Christ completely. We shall have all the **blessings** we can possibly imagine. All the **satisfaction** that lusts for things of earth can’t provide. All the **joy** that all the money in the world can’t give. All the **health** and spending every waking our counting calories can never deliver. All the **approvals** and **honor** that we crave from and try to squeeze out of our performances and jobs and titles. It all shall be ours. With certainty. And if we are so certain we shall have it then, why step on one another to try and take it for ourselves in cheap ways today that will never last. That’s what John is saying! The more we set our hearts on that now effect of this future hope, the more we grow in his grace, holiness and purity. So what is your heart fixed upon? The more we set our hearts and our hopes on the lavish love of God, in the glory that awaits us, and what Jesus has done for us, then the more we find ourselves growing in purity right now. The How is in the Who. The more time we spend in the loving presence of our Father, that presence begins to transform us more and more to his likeness.

When the day came for Emma’s hearing for her adoption, I was as proud as I could be. We had family in the judge’s chambers for the hearing. People gathered around, smiling. Even the judge. I had Emma on my lap, gently bouncing her on my knee...because that’s what I’d seen other dad’s do. Bounce, you know. Well, I may have been a little too vigorous with my bouncing.

The judge asked, mid bounce, who is to be the Father of this child. I proudly said, “I am.” And as I said it, Emma spit up all over me. Projectile spit up. And the judge calmly remarked, “Yes, you are.” He went on, “From this day forward, this child is your daughter and no laws or rights can be denied her as your child,” or something like that. I was so proud, and beaming. Missy and I could not stop smiling because of the love we had for this little girl, Our little girl...with spit up on me and all.

We are God’s beloved in his lap, and we dirty ourselves in our sin all the time. And yet, his love flows. His grace abounds, his smile, his affection for you knows no end for you are his child. His promise to grow you to be more like Jesus abounds. That’s where holiness starts: seeing our needs in light of his great, massive, out of this world love he has given us. As you sit in his lap, he knows exactly where you have been, how you have lived and what remains in you now...and yet, his love and transforming power overflows. There are no rights of a child of God that are denied you. Holiness, battling our persistent sin starts with his love that puts an end to our shame. You are God’s children NOW because he set his affection on you, his transformational love to make you his child. Real childlikeness in the arms of your Father is to remember who you are.