

Lesson 12: “How Great a Love and Hope”**1 John 3:1-2****Craig Crawshaw**

This is one of Scripture’s most encouraging and uplifting passages. Here the apostle John points out in stirring rhetoric how great a love and hope we have as followers of Christ. We are so loved by God that He calls us His children. And we have such a great hope that when Christ appears we will be made like Him, seeing Him for all that He truly is. Let us attempt to unpack the marvelous truths of this passage.

1 John 3:1-2 *See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*

BEHOLD

Most all of our newer translations begin with the word “see.” But in this, we lose much of the grandeur of the message that the earlier translations tried to capture in the word, “behold,” which in my estimation is much closer to the original intent of the Greek. To “see” is simply to observe. But to “behold” is to stop and take in the wonder while pondering its deep meaning.

The Greek word translated “see” or “behold” is used sparingly in the Scripture, for it begs us to tarry in contemplation of an especially glorious thought. The thought here worthy of our special attention is how great a love it is that God would call us His children. It makes no natural sense that we should be siblings with Jesus the Son, or that we should be made co-heirs with Christ in all the glory of heaven. That God would adopt us into His family, sinners and weak as we are, boggles the senses. That we are His created children, yes, we can understand this. But that we are His beloved adopted heirs to the throne of glory?

And what manner of love is it that would reach out to those who had habitually rejected and demeaned Him, rehabilitate by the death of His only begotten Son, and then call to be at His side in full honor and status! If you struggle to imagine the wonder of this, consider this scenario: A well-to-do man takes a strange fancy to a rough and tumble group of ruffians and scoundrels who hold him in contempt. To win them to himself he sends His own beloved blood son to die, that this lot of ruffians would have the run of his house, making them his adopted sons and giving them full right to his inheritance. Now this insane scenario may not be a perfect analogy, but it touches on the strange and wonderful manner of love with which we have been treated by God.

We are to be awed by this love, and humbled by this love. We are not in any way to think that we are worthy of this love or that God is bound by His person to love us this way. We are to “behold” it with wonder, awe and life-long devotion and appreciation.

LAVISHED

The word here translated “bestowed” begins to deliver the punch of the message, for to “bestow” is to grant some great honor and privilege. I like the further thought of “lavished” on us in extravagance. This love is what we would say is “way over the top” – going above and beyond anything we could imagine.

It is one wonderful thing to be rehabilitated, and another wonderful thing to be allowed to come to heaven. But to be made a child of the King? And a co-heir of His kingdom and of His glorious riches? Way over the top! – Lavish!

SONS OF GOD

I know this translation and most other modern ones use “children of God.” But in truth, the Greek clearly is masculine and should be correctly translated “sons” of God. “Children” is certainly accurate, for we learn that men are like sons and women are like daughters.

2 Corinthians 6:18 *“And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty.*

This might be more understanding of the women who might be frustrated or questioning being called a “son.” “Children” might be accurate, but is not complete in relating the truth of the passage. We must realize that through the centuries it was the son who received the inheritance, and not the daughter. So when God calls you, women, a “son of God,” it is not an ignoring of your femininity, but a grand and glorious acknowledgment of your equal inheritance as an heir with Christ. Yes, you are a precious daughter of God, as God calls you in 1 Corinthians 6:18. But when it comes to your calling as joint-heir with Christ in His inheritance, you are a royal “son of God.” And that is a much higher calling, and more accurately reflects the wonder of this passage.

CHILDREN BY DIVINE ADOPTION

All are God’s creation, and in this general sense all humans are God’s children. But the truth is that we are born as children of this world, with no connection or right to the heavenly kingdom. In this sense we are born truly children of the devil, for without Christ the devil is the one we most resemble and follow. But when we accept Jesus as the Savior of our soul and Lord of our life, God does an amazing thing beyond the amazing thing of “saving” us: He adopts us into His eternal family.

Galatians 4:4-7 *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.*

Notice it is the Holy Spirit that here declares that we are “sons of God.” And it is Jesus the Son who instructed His disciples to pray “Our Father, who is in heaven ...” and He instructed Mary Magdalene after His resurrection: *“I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.” (John 20:17)* So all three of the Godhead - Father, Son and Spirit – proclaim that Christ-followers are children (“sons”) of the Heavenly Father.

Yes, it takes a great manner of love to adopt. And that is true for adoptive parents as well as an adoptive Heavenly Father. Behold!

AND SUCH WE ARE

And note that we are not only “called” sons of God, we ARE sons of God – now and forever. Our adoption “papers” are signed, sealed and delivered by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and confirmed by the indwelling Holy Spirit. But John goes on to say that as sure as this truth is, the world does not regard us as anything special. It should not surprise us, because they treated Jesus as nothing special.

But how dare we as believers ever languish in self-pity or depression about our circumstance, however dire. How dare we complain about how the world treats us, for the world treated our Lord with open disdain. We are a child of the King! We are adopted into His royal forever family! We are co-heirs of the glory of heaven! - and this, no matter what others might acknowledge or whatever the world throws at us. The disciple John had beheld many wonders in his life – the miracles of Jesus and the visions of heaven written in Revelation to name just a couple. But this wonder of God's lavish love in adopting His followers into His divine family was to John a wonder to top all wonders. And it should be for us as well! And such we are! Behold!

HOW GREAT A HOPE – LIKE HIM

We have to this point been rejoicing in "how great a love." But now in verse two we transition to "how great a hope" as a result of this great love expressed in our divine adoption.

John tells us something we don't know, and then something we do know. What we don't and cannot know is the fullness of what our status will be in heaven. We can know with confidence (our study's key word) that we are presently children of God and that this status will not change. But "what we will be" in heaven is veiled from our understanding. We know we will reign with Him, but what exactly does that mean? We know there will be glories untold, but what will they be?

But there is something very important that John wants us to know with certainty about our future in the next life. And this knowledge is intended to give us much hope and motivation to stay pure in our earthly walk (vs. 3). One, Jesus will indeed appear, just as He promised. To some that "appearance" will be in the clouds at what we know as the rapture. This will be for those who are still alive at that moment. To others that "appearance" will be when we first see Jesus in heaven, if we die before He returns to earth.

Either way, when we first see Jesus face to face an amazing thing will happen to each of us believers: "We will be like Him." That doesn't and can't mean that we will become divine, or a replica of the Savior. Nor can it mean that we will become all-knowing, all-powerful and all-present as He is as God. But it apparently means that we will become "pure, as He is pure" (from verse 3). This hope helps keep us "pure" in this life, but ultimately we will be pure as in "sinless" when we see Him face to face. We will be "like Him" in pure sinlessness. Wow!

All my inappropriate thoughts will be gone. All my misguided motives will vanish. All my tendencies to rebel and do "my own thing" will be history. My selfishness will be no more. My love for others will be perfected. My love and adoration of God will be magnified to the max. I will indeed become all that God has intended for me and all that I have ever hoped to be.

To use the language of Romans 8:29 reflecting God's eternal purpose for me, I will become "conformed to the image of Christ."

Romans 8:29 *For those He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son ...*

I will retain my personality, but it will no longer be flawed in sin. I will retain my identity, but I will fully understand that my real identity is in reflecting His person. I will retain being recognized as me, but I will appear to others as the best possible version of myself. All because I will be “like Him” in perfection. Amazing! I can’t wait!

HOW GREAT A HOPE – SEEING HIM AS HE IS

How is it that I will “be like Him?” We are here told. I will finally see Jesus just as He truly is, in all His perfection. It will be the ultimate “Ah ha!” moment. Our vision of Jesus now is a combination of multiple artists’ renderings and our own imagination of what we think He might or should look like. The Scripture teaches of His perfect character, but it cannot make us like Him by its reading. Only His Spirit within us can transform us, and then only partially because of our yet sinful mortal body.

But when we see Him face to face in all His glory and all His perfection, His purity will transform our impurity. His perfection will transform our imperfection. Just as the written Word now can cleanse us to a point, seeing the living Word of Jesus will fully cleanse us to perfection. Oh what a hope and expectation!

O TO BE LIKE THEE Chisholm/Kirkpatrick

O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer
This is my constant longing and prayer
Gladly I’ll forfeit all of earth’s treasures
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear

O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee!
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart

May this lavish love of being His children, plus this glorious hope of seeing Jesus and being cleansed to sinless perfection, cause us to live our lives in greater love for others and greater purity of self in this life, while we wait for our metamorphic transformation to come!