CHILDREN OF GOD

1 John 2:29-3:3

Key Verse: 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!”

From the last lesson, we learned what a grace it is that we have an anointing from the Holy One. This anointing gives us discernment to see what’s happening in our lives and in this world and gives us power to stand with Christ and against the world of antichrists. May we keep this anointing in our hearts and be led by the Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth.

Today’s passage starts with 2:29, which says, “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” In this verse, we find new words in the flow of 1 John, “righteous” “right” and “born of him.” Like other epistles, 1 John also has a clear ethical teaching, that is doing what is right, because God is righteous and Jesus is the righteous one. Keeping God’s command which has been written in this epistle is definitely related to that. Now John develops this concept further in chapter 3. And John indicates in 2:29 that doing what is right is a sort of proof of being born of God. This concept is mentioned again in chapter 3 (3:9). three times. This amazing blessing of God then leads John to pause and think about God’s great love and the children of God and the future glory of God’s children and their holy life in the world. It tells us who are and what we will be and how we are to live in this world

**First, God’s great love and children of God (3:1).** 3:1 says, “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!” Here, we see two exclamation marks. It leads us to think of children of God and God’s great love. What can be a greater identity than a child of God? There are sons and daughters of kings and presidents and generals, the rich and other powerful people in the world. There are also children of humanly noble people. Yet, who can be compared to the children of God? God is the Creator, Almighty. Everything came from Him. He is eternal and has life in himself. God is light, meaning he is perfectly holy and righteous. God is absolutely pure and so loving; God is love. Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. Children of God have the very life and nature of God in them, being born of God. “Called to be children of God” means no one can change this status. Being God’s children is legally, positionally and relationally so. There is no higher status than this, now and forever, even after being glorified. Even angels envy children of God (1 Pe 1:12).

In the Old Testament, there is no such a term as “children of God”. John 1:10-13 says, “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” The atmosphere was that the world rejected him, and even his chosen people in the holy land. But there were some who received him, who believed in his name. Then, something amazing happened in them. They became children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” No human background, human will or plan was involved. Here, becoming children of God is expressed as a right. What a right! What a privilege! No human right can have such a power. Here, “right” is in Greek *exousia* meaning “power” or “authority”. No military power, political power, financial power, intellectual power, technological power like AI, or the united power of the whole world, could produce a single child of God. It is only by God’s power to those who received him, who believed in his name, while the world rejected him. This was so great and so wonderful that John had to write this in the introduction of John’s gospel. He could not wait for this writing.

There was once a good man, very religious, intellectual, well-respected and wealthy. He came to Jesus at night, because he was not happy with himself despite all these human achievements. Who could help such a man? But Jesus said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (ESV, Jn 3:3) and then he said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” One’s being born again and becoming a child of God is solely by the power of God. It is a miracle of God and a mystery of God. We know that God becoming man, the Incarnation, is a miracle, a mystery of God. We can also say that man becoming a child of God is a miracle, a mystery of God. Both are miracles of God and mysteries of God. So John wrote these two things side by side together in John 1:13 and 14 in the introduction of John’s gospel. We can say that the Son of God became the Son of Man so that sons of men may become sons of God, children of God. How can we fathom this mysterious work of God, our becoming children of God? How can we describe this blessing of God? We only exclaim and thank and praise God.

What indications do I have that I am a child of God? First of all, men and women who are children of God are aware of a new life, a new nature within them. We are children of God when we are deeply aware of sin within and live a life of repentance, being responsive to the words of God. Next, God’s children have a desire for God and a desire for the things of God and a desire to walk in the ways of God. They delight in the things of God and love the words of God and want to pray more and more. All these can be indications of being children of God.

Then, how could it be possible that we are called to be children of God? It is wholly because of the love of God. John exclaimed here, “How great is the love the Father lavished on us…” In other translations, “See what great love the Father lavished on us…” (NIV 2011), and “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us…” (KJV). John expressed this love of God excellently in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” For, the amazing work of God of making sinful human beings into children of God, God the Father paid the incredible price of his One and Only Son. Truly, this must have been the most difficult thing for God to do. But he did it, because of his love for sinners like you and me. The price of giving his One and Only Son cannot be compared to even the price of the whole universe. Giving his One and Only Son is one thing, but how he gave the Son is another. Giving his One and Only Son meant sacrificing his own Son on the cross so that he might be the atoning sacrifice/propitiation for man’s sins. When the Son cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” God remained silent in order to pay the high cost to the end. Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things?” When God gave up his Son, he gave us everything. In other words, he lavished his love upon sinners without sparing anything. Paul also said in Ephesians 2:4, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ…”

This love of God is the source of our strength and the strongest power we have in this world. So Paul said further in Romans 8:35-38, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble of hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness of danger or sword? …No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to sperate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Then, in 3:1 John says, “And that is what we are.” Children of God – this is our God’s given identity, here and now and forever. This is truly our great identity. Paul wrote about it this way in Galatians 4:6, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’” Paul also further wrote about this in Romans 8:15-17, “…you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ…” Truly this is an amazing blessing of God.

Then, John said more in 3:1, “The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” The world recognizes children of so-called great people. But the world does not acknowledge children of God, because it did not know God and Christ Jesus the Son of God. It is good to remember that when Jesus lived in this world, the world was a Roman world. Roman power crucified Jesus, the Son of God, by collaborating with the religious leaders of that time. The world did so, simply because Jesus Christ lived a holy life, speaking the truth of God. Further more, the world have thwarted God’s salvation work for mankind. Yet, God has accomplished his plan and his purpose in his sovereign power despite the rejection of the world. Jesus said in John 15:18-22, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first…They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.”1 Peter 4:16 says, “If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” In 1 John 3:13, John says, “Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.” When we think of John, after writing this epistle, he would be exiled at the island of Patmos. We remember Revelation 1:9, “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” Yet, there he saw the amazing vision of God and wrote Revelation, whose theme was Christ Jesus’ imminent coming and the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of the beast, the antichrist, becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and the final eternal kingdom of God.

In 3:2, John says again, “Dear friends, now we are children of God.” What a grace it is that you and I should be called children of God? John said in 5:19, “We know hat we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” He wants us to know these two things. Children of God are to have a clear view of the world based on the words of God. May we truly keep this tremendous identity and live as children of God in this world, whatever the cost may be, being forever thankful for the great love of God in Christ Jesus.

**Second, being like him (3:2).** In verse 2, after saying “Now we are children of God”, John says, “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.” “We shall be like him” Wow! The child is like the parent. God’s children are to resemble God. We shall be as beautiful as Jesus the Son of God, being pure, humble and obedient, so loving, merciful and truthful. This glorification will happen when Jesus comes again. So Paul said in Colossians 3:4, “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” He also said in 1 Corinthians 15:49, “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” Paul also wrote in Philippians 3:20-21, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” With our glorious body we shall see him as he is. This is also as we studied in Revelation in 22:4, “They will see his face…” Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face…”

Children of God are destined for that state of glory. The glory of “we shall be like him” and “we shall see him as he is” includes the hope and vision we studied in Revelation. At the seventh trumpet sound, John heard a loud voice in heaven say in Revelation 11:15, “…The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” And John wrote in Revelation 21:1-5, “‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He 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.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’” And we could see the vivid picture of the New Jerusalem, which was shinning with the glory of God, made of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal and gold as pure as glass over the whole city. And the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple, and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. May we keep this glorious hope of God in our hearts as his children.

**Third, purifying oneself (3:3).** Verse 3 says, “(And) everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” Here we need to understand the meaning of “purifying oneself.” It is written in 1 John 1:7, “…the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin,” and in 1:9, “he…will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Here the word “purify” is in Greek, *katharizó*. In all other translations, it is to “cleanse.” It is like removing a dirt from our clothes. When we repent of our sins, God forgives us of our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Here, in 3:3, “purify” is in Greek *hagnizó*. Although “cleansing” and “purifying” are similar words, it will be good to distinguish the two. To “purify” means, in a sense, not only to get rid of the tarnishing effect of sin upon me, but also to avoid sin in one’s whole nature and being. Purifying oneself is more like struggling against the sinful nature to be like Christ the Lord himself and to be pleasing in His sight. Purifying is our active struggle to walk with Jesus, denying oneself and taking up one’s cross and following Jesus. It is to positively obey the words of God and keep his commandments. This is what John has taught until now, “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his command” (2:3), “If anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him” (2:5) and “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (2:6). We remember Jesus’ prayer to God the Father for the sanctification of his disciples, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” and then he said in the prayer, “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” Here the word “sanctify” is *hagiazó* similar to the Greek word *hagnizó*, “purify”, in 1 John 3:3. Even Jesus sanctified himself, though he was conceived by the Holy Spirit with no connection at all to Adam’s original sin. Coming in flesh, he had to struggle to sanctify himself so that he might overcome temptation and not sin against God. So, in him is no sin (3:4). He sanctified himself to obey God unto death.

Who can purify himself? Here John wrote, “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” In other translations, there is a conjunction “And.” The characteristic of those who are born of God and so become children of God is that they want to purify themselves just as Christ is pure in the hope of glorification and of the eternal glorious kingdom of God, though it is not easy. John wrote in 5:3, “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.” Jesus expressed it this way in Matthew 11:29-30, “Take my yoke upon you ad learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart…For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

There are those who strive to live a holy life, different from the people of the world, keeping morality and many rules and regulations. This kind of struggle is not bad. But striving to live a holy life itself has great limitation. They can turn out to be legalistic and self-righteous. We remember Pharisees who struggled desperately to keep so many laws and rules meticulously. But they became legalists and they joined in the crucifixion of Christ Jesus. Here, again John said, “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself as he is pure.” In purifying ourselves, keeping this hope in him is so significant. In this hope of glory based on the amazing grace of being children of God, we purify ourselves. Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:18, “I consider that our present sufferings are not work comparing with the glory that will e revealed in us.” He also said in Colossians 3:1-2, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Paul said of the importance of heart-setting and mind-setting. Then he said, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” He mentioned evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. It is similar to John’s writing, “Do not love the world…” Again we are reminded of James 4:4, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hated toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” Purifying oneself is positively loving God and loving our neighbour. It is loving Jesus and feeding his sheep out of love for him. It is to earnestly and consistently pray, “Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” And Paul said in Philippians 2:12-13, “…continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Colossians 4:2 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:13, “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” God’s purpose for his children is well expressed in Romans 8:29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Thank God for his great love that we should be called children of God. May we keep this tremendous identity in our hearts and live as his children in this world whatever the cost may be, having the hope of glory in our hearts and purifying ourselves, just as he is pure.