

Like Father Like Son

1 John

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Bible Text: 1 John 2:29-3:3
Preached on: Sunday, May 1, 2022

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Dear congregation, we continue our study this morning of John's first epistle and our text is the words that we read from 1 John 2:29, the last verse of chapter 2 into verse 3 of chapter 3. In many ways this begins a new section, verse 29, it begins a new section when it says that God is righteous. If you that he is righteous, up to this point we've been looking at the fact that God was light and what that means for the people of God, but here John is saying and speaking about God as righteous and he's going to explain what that means for the people of God also. The final section, this begins in chapter 4, where it tells us that God is love and he will tell us what that means for ourselves. But here he begins this new section, "If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone that does righteousness is born of God."

Well, last time we simply wanted to focus our attention on the marvelous love of the Father. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God." This marvelous love of God the Father makes sinners into sons, but here in these verses this morning, we want to notice that this love that makes sinners sons, there's also the love that makes unlovely people lovely. It's the love that makes unlovely people lovely. Now for God's people, this can be hard to think about and to believe because we look at ourselves and we say spiritually, we don't feel like we're lovely people, but yet the Bible tells us over and again that when God looks at his people, they are beautiful to him. You think, for example, of Psalm 149, the Lord, it says, takes pleasure in his people and he will be autify the meek with his salvation. You think of Psalm 45 that speaks about the daughter of the king, the bride of Christ, and it tells us there in verse 13 that the daughter is all glorious within, that the clothes that she's wearing, the garments that she's wearing, they've been made, they've been wrought with gold and silver. She is beautiful and what the Lord is saying is whatever you think of yourself, you are beautiful to me. But of course, the great reason why they are beautiful in God's sight is because God now sees his own image in them. He sees the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and then he sees his work of salvation, and then he sees the graces that the Holy Spirit has put into them, and then he sees his own work and he sees his own. Image, and that's what makes them so beautiful.

To put it very simply then, God's people have the family likeness. Like father like son. Now that's true in in the world in which we live. You, young boys here, you want to be

like your father. You want to be able to run as fast as he can run. You want to be as strong or stronger than he is. You want to be like your father. And that's true of young boys and young girls, they want to be like their dad or their mom, and they begin to copy their features. They began to sound like the way their mum speaks, or the way their dad speaks. And so you come and you look at a family picture and you say, "Now I see it. She's so like her mother or he he's the double of his father."

So what's true in the world in which we live is also true in the spiritual world. Like father like son. We've seen that John has spoken many times about, he's called the people little children, he's used family language, and here in verse 29 right at the end you notice that it says they are born of him. They are born of God. That reminds you what Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again." That word "again," by the way, it could also be translated "from above." You must have a different kind of birth to the one you had in your mother's womb. You must be born from above. You must be born by God. You must be born by the Spirit. And when that is true, when you are born again by the Spirit of God, this will also more and more be true, like father like son. The reason that anybody begins to look like God, like the Father in heaven, like the Lord Jesus Christ, John is telling us, is not because you have turned over a new leaf, you have started to try harder and you've committed yourself to some self-help program or anything like that. No, he says the reason you begin to look like God is because you were born again. You were born from above.

So the question we ask ourselves this morning is: do we have the family likeness? Now in this picture some of the picture is really blurry, some of the picture is really unclear, some of the features of the face and the hands and the feet of the children of God is not clear like it should be. But there is one person in this family picture who is absolutely clear, where you can see the details perfectly and where he looks absolutely perfect and that, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we consider this theme of, like father like son, John also does this, he looks firstly at Christ, at the one who is perfectly the Son, the one who perfectly has the family image. So we're going to look at like, father like the son. We're also going to look at like father like the sons, people like you and me. But the basic point John is making in these verses is this: those who have been born again and been clearly identified by their resemblance to the Son, those who have been born again can be clearly identified by their resemblance to the Son, and we see that in three ways as you have it in your bulletin. Firstly, in relation to righteousness. Secondly, in relation to the godless world. And then thirdly, in relation to moral purity.

Like father like son. Firstly, in relation to righteousness, looked again at verse 29 of chapter 2, "If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does righteousness is born of him." We go to the next chapter in verse 7, chapter 3:7, "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. Like father like son.

Now righteousness, when you speak about righteousness, we're speaking about doing what is right, and what is right is the law of God. So the righteous person is the person who is keeping the law of God. So the point then is obvious: if you are born of God, if

you're one of the family, if you're in the family picture, you will be recognizable in terms of what you do. If you were consistently evil, if the whole direction of your life is this direction towards your own self and your own desires and all that the world can give you, you're not a child of God. If there is any this desire, though, to go in this direction. Yes, you feel tugged here at times, but this is your desire, you want to go in this direction, the law of God, then you are a child of God. That's what John is saying. Like father like son.

It's what Jesus was saying in John 8, remember? The question that Jesus was asking there was really, "Whose father are you?" And the Jews, "Well, we have Abraham to our father." There has been this clash between Jesus and the Jews and Jesus has been teaching them and they don't like his teaching, and they're saying, "You were born of fornication. But we, we're the Jews, we have Abraham to our father." And Jesus is getting them to ask this question, "Whose father, though, are you really?" And the point he's making is the point John's making here, you will be like your father. Like father like son. And so they say, "Abraham is our father," and Jesus says, "If that's true, you should be like Abraham." So he begins to tell them what Abraham did, what Abraham said, what Abraham thought about Jesus. "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham, but now you're trying to kill me because I've told you the truth, which I have heard of God. This did not Abraham. You're not like Abraham. You do the works of your father. You are like your father," he goes on and says. "If God was your Father, you would love me but you are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father you do. He was a murderer from the beginning and here you are trying to murder me. He did not abide in the truth and you're not listening to my words. He speaks a lie, he's the father of lies. So are you. You're like your father. Like father like son."

And the question for us spiritually, then, is who is our father? Who are we like? If we are born of God, we will come more and more to have the same mind as Jesus Christ, the same attitude as Jesus Christ to the commandments of God. And so you look at Christ and you apply this test reverently to Jesus. Like Father like Son. And Jesus indeed applies this test to himself. Remember, in John 15 he says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love," listen, "even as I have kept my Father's commandments." Jesus is saying, "I have kept my Father's commandments. I'm like my Father. I've always done what pleases him. I always have reference to his word and his will and his law, and I have always done it. I've never told a lie. I've never stolen. I've never killed. I've always put God first. I have always done what is right." Jesus can say, "I am righteous. I am like my Father perfectly."

And you can go through the whole life of Jesus and this is what you're going to find, like Father like Son, so that he can say to Philip towards the end of his life, "If you have seen me, you've seen the Father," because like Father like Son.

You think of Jesus with the rich young ruler and you ask will he be righteous? Here comes this young man, attractive young man, and Jesus says, we're told that Jesus loved him, there's something very lovable about this man's character and he comes and he says, "I've tried to be good. I've tried to be righteous my whole life long. I've always tried to do the right thing. I've kept all the commandments of God," remember he says. "What do I

lack?" Now, what would be the right thing to say to that man? There's something in you that would almost want to say, "Well, that's good. You've done your best. One thing you lack, go and sell everything that you have, give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come and follow me." You see, that is righteous. That is the right thing to say. Jesus doesn't relax the law for this young man.

Think of Jesus at Gethsemane. Think of him there as he sees basically the horror of hell in front him, the sins of all his people and all these sins are he is to drink them. They're all in a cup that he has to drink. And there what does he ask? What is Jesus asking at Gethsemane? He's asking, "What is my Father's will? Not my will, but your will be done." He is righteous, like Father like Son. And we thank God this morning that this perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is the righteousness of his people. It's the only righteousness you need. It's the only thing that God's people desire and need for the salvation of their souls, and we can look at what Jesus has done in his perfection his whole life long and you can say, like the psalmist does in Psalm 71, "I will make mention of his righteousness even of his only." That righteousness is perfect behavior, it's perfect behavior. Like Father like Son. Perfect. The gospel is saying you can have it as yours this morning. And you don't add to it, you don't earn it, you don't deserve it, you don't add stitches to it. It's Christ and he's giving it to you in the gospel. That does not contradict what John is saying here. What John is saying here is if Christ is righteous and you have been born of God and you are united to Jesus Christ, you will practice, righteousness. You will have the same nature. You will have the same thoughts, the same desires. Not perfectly, but you will have them.

If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone that does righteousness is born of him. Yes, it's blurry. Yes, the features are not clear like they should be. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but you will have the same mind as Christ. You will think the same things more and more as Christ. You will look at God the Father and you will say he is righteous. You will look at the law that we read this morning, you will look at the Bible and you will say, "I would change nothing. I would change nothing in this law. The problem is not with the law, the problems with me. The law is good, the law is holy, the law is righteous." Well, you're thinking the same thing as Christ. You look at Christ himself and you think the same thing as the Father thinks of him. "This is my beloved Son. He's perfect. I am well pleased with him." And you begin to think the same thing, don't you? He is perfect. He everything I need. I wouldn't change it. I take him simply as he is. Like Father like the sons. You look at the gospel, you look at the way of salvation and you say it's perfect. I wouldn't change it. But Christ died for sinners like me, and that I get no glory, that I can do nothing to save myself, but I simply take him and what he is and what he has done, and I receive him only by faith. And I give all the glory and I give my crown and I throw it at his feet and say he is worthy of all praise. For like Father like sons, you're thinking the same thing as God the Father is thinking. You know that everyone that does righteousness is born of him.

Here, secondly, we see what John says in verse 1. Like father like son. Firstly, in relation to righteousness, but here also in verse 1 in relation to the godless world. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the Sons of

God: therefore," therefore, "the world knows us not because it did not know him." This is one of the great effects of being called a son of God, being made a son. It separates you from the ungodly world, it always has done. All the way back remember with Adam and Eve, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. There are at enmity. God says, "I'm going to put enmity between these two, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent." And you go down through genesis through the Old Testament and you see these two seats, two kinds of people emerging under enmity, that they are separate, they don't understand each other, they don't tolerate each other's world worldview.

And of course, you see that in perfectly in Christ. Jesus came to the world, the world he made, the world he upholds, the world he gave his life to, he came to, he came into it. That's what you read in John 1. The world did not know him, didn't recognize him, had no sympathy with him. They didn't know him. Of course, they knew who he was in terms of, "He's from Nazareth and we know his father," they said, "Joseph. We know his mother Mary." They knew where he grew up but they couldn't understand him. They didn't get it. They couldn't enter into his deepest joys or his deepest sorrows, so they rejected him, didn't understand this love for God. They didn't understand his zeal for God. They didn't understand what he was doing when he said the sinner is to come to him. They didn't understand what they saw when they looked at him eating with publicans, tax collectors and sinners. It didn't make sense to them. They didn't know, they didn't recognize him. They didn't understand that. They didn't understand why he would heal on the Sabbath day because the Pharisees said you don't do that on the Sabbath day. They didn't understand why is he doing this on the Sabbath day? They didn't understand the place he gave to women. They didn't understand the place he gave to children. They didn't understand that he would bypass them, the important people, and he'd pick up little children and he would bless them. They didn't know him. They didn't understand him. And the more they saw who he really was, the less they understood him.

Well, like father like son. Like father like sons. The world's attitude to Christ has carried over into the children of God now. Those who love Christ, those who depend on him, those who come on a Lord's Day morning, Sunday morning to church too listen to a man speak about the Bible. That's on a Sunday. Aren't there far better things you could do with your time than this? Those who come and say, "My greatest joy, my greatest treasure, my greatest glory, is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." That's what they boast. "That's what I love. That's why I hung onto. That's the one thing that I will not have anyone take from me. You can take anything from me, you can steal my home, you can steal my money, you can be my reputation, you can take away my work, you can take away everything, Christ alone and his cross alone, that's the one thing I cannot and I will not part with." The world doesn't understand you. "What are you talking about?" The world doesn't know you.

The world does know a certain kind of Christianity. It knows a Christianity without the cross. They know a Christianity that simply wants to tolerate everyone, will love everybody, will turn the other cheek, but there's no place for the cross as the only way to God. The world understands a Christianity that tries to Christianize everything, that tries to Christianize bad movies and bad music and that kind of thing. Well, Christianizing,

well, the world will know you and really, that's a great question: are we Christians that the ungodly world is starting to understand? Are we Christians that the ungodly world is starting to understand? Because John says here if we are children of God, there's this great therefore, the world does not know you. And the conclusion we would draw then, like father like son, like father like sons: if the ungodly world can relate to your greatest joys, and if the ungodly world can relate to your deepest sorrows, you're not a child of God.

You look at the persecuted church in the world, we can learn a lot from them. You can look at the Middle East today or Eastern Europe and you look at this war that's going on, great persecution in many ways, and yet there's something they have, a joy that they have even in the context of the greatest of sufferings that is simply unexplainable. Except this: that they are children of God.

I think it was about maybe it was last summer, I remember, in Nigeria there was all these, the horrendous persecution, families that are being butchered. I remember seeing a video of one of their worship services the next Lord's Day, and this is the most intense of grief and yet here they are worshipping God with the greatest of joy. They're clapping their hands with joy. Well, how do you explain this? The world doesn't know that. Explain it this way, "You now therefore have sorrow," Jesus said, "but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice and your joy no man takes from you," John 16:22.

Samuel Davis, the American teacher, describes the people of God as princes in disguise. It's a beautiful picture really, princes in disguise. The world looks at these people, these Nigerians, these Ukrainian Christians, these persecuted Christians the whole world over, what do they have? Would you want to be one of them? They are princes in disguise to the world but not to God. Princes in disguise.

Well, let's lastly here look, like father like son, in relation to moral purity. Look at verse 3 of chapter 3, "every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure." Every man who has this hope. Again, you look at Christ and you would say Christ had hope. Remember what it says in Psalm 22 about Jesus when he was in his mother's womb, when he was a little baby? "You made me hope," he says, "when I was on my mother's breasts." He had hope that he was going to be with the Father. He had that joy that was set before him. Jesus had hope, real hope in God. He had hope. Remember Psalm 16, "I have set the Lord always before me. He will not leave my soul in the grave therefore my flesh rests in hope." Jesus had hope. Well, like father like son. Every man that has this hope in him, and here you come and you have hope in God, you have hope in his word, you have hope that your soul, your body will not be left in the grave, you have hope that there is this glory that is coming in the Father's house.

"And every man that has this hope in him," it says, "purifies himself." Now that's something you can't say of Jesus. He was always pure. He did not need to purify himself. He was pure. From his conception to his grave, to his glory, he is pure. You look at verse 5 of chapter 3, you know that Jesus "was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin." It's a beautiful, isn't it, a beautiful characteristic of Jesus. He is without sin. Just

think about that. He lived in this world with people like you and like me for 33 some years and from his conception to his birth, to his childhood with annoying brothers and sisters, no doubt, to his life, to his ministry where he had Jews telling him that he was born in fornication, to Gethsemane, to the cross, to the grave, he is without sin. He is pure. He is the God who is light and in him is no darkness at all.

I love to think of the sinlessness of Jesus. Like Father like Son. Like father like sons. Those who have this hope in Christ, they purify themselves. They desire to be like Jesus. They long to be like Jesus. They long to see him like he is and to be like him, but here and now they find this fight within them and they pursue holiness, they're going in this direction not in that one. They want to be holy. They want to be like Christ. They say like Robert Murray M'Cheyne, "Make me as holy as a sinner saved by grace can be." Is that a prayer you would have? Make me as holy as a sinner saved by grace can be and so they purify themselves.

It's not a command. It's simply a statement of fact. This is what happens. This is what happens when you are a child of God, you purify yourself. This is what happens when I have a child who is born and they begin to eat, I don't need to tell them to eat, they eat, they drink, they cry, they sleep, they get up again, they eat and then they are recouped. This is what happens when you're a child. Well, when you're a child of God, this is what happens, you purify yourself because you have this new nature, you have this new life. You begin to eat the word of God. You begin to drink the milk of the word. You begin to love God. You begin to use all the means that your Father has given that make you more like him.

And so you purify yourselves, but it does speak, too, to the activity of the people of God. The children of God are not lazy. They're not saying, "Well, let go and let God." They're not defeatists when it comes to sin. They don't say, "Well, this is the way I am and so I can't do anything about it anyway. This is what everyone else is doing so I'm just doing it too. I'm sowing my wild oats. This is who I am." John is saying if you're a child of God, that's not who you are. That's not who you are. If you're born of God, you purify yourself.

Every man who has this hope in him purifies himself. Well, we have to examine ourselves, congregation, and ask: do we long and earnestly seek to be conformed to the image of God the Father? Maybe let me put it this way: is there a sin in your life, any sin, is there a sin in your life that if God this morning would come down and say to you 1:1, face-to-face, "I will take that sin away right here, right now. It will never trouble you again." Is there any sin in your life over which you would say, "Don't take that one. Take these but not this one." So if God would come and say, "Here's your sin, here's the sin that easily besets you, here's the sin that you find love for and I'm going to take it away," what would you say? How would you reply? Would you say to God, "Take it." Or would you say to God, "Leave it." If you say "leave it," you're not a child of God. If you say, "Lord, please take it. Take it and I never want to see it again." It's an evidence you're a child of God.

Well, here is God the Father and he comes in his word so often and there's titles of God that may scare us, he's the judge of all, he's the great and the glorious and the dreadful God, but this morning he's coming and he's saying, "I am the Father," and it's a title that speaks about love and care and pity and protection and willingness, and he's coming and he's saying to his people here, "My children, this is my will for you, this is what I want for your life, your sanctification, to be made more like my Son." And he's coming to us all and this is the God and Father who calls unlovely sinners and makes them lovely sons. And you've all been taught the Lord's Prayer and in your baptism you have a right to pray this. You can pray, "Our Father, which art in heaven." Children, you can pray that because of your baptism and as the Shorter Catechism tells us in that first petition, "Our Father which art in heaven," that this teaches us to draw near to God, come close to God like you would come close to your earthly father who's saying, "Come to me, my child." Draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence as children to a father who is able and ready to help you, and that you should pray with, for others.

Well, may the Lord give us these things and may the Lord bless his word. Let's pray.