

1 John 2:29- 3:3 (NKJV) March 1

29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

1 John 3:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Last week I preached on this same passage. As I kept thinking about the text I kept thinking about how I had not done it justice. I don't think I need to **recant** anything that I said. But I did not do enough to capture the wonder of the truth of it.

I was glad to see that I was not alone. Martin Lloyd Jones says, **"I have often felt that I would like to preach (on this passage) but there are certain great words like this in Scripture of which frankly I am, in a sense, frightened; frightened as a preacher, lest anything that I say may detract from them or may rob anyone of their greatness and their glory. That may be wrong, but this is how it always affects me."**

Our text is somewhat like the grand canyon. You cannot look at any part of it without seeing beauty and wonder. I don't think you could take an ugly picture of it.

And that is exactly what John intended when He said it.

We are going to revisit it this morning to plumb some more of its depths. But be certain that when we are done we will only have scratched the surface. Now remember that John is writing this so we might have **joy**. And John is telling us how that happens.

In verses 1-2 of the first chapter we saw that the historical Christ is the source of joy.

Then 1:3 to 2:28 were the hindrances to joy and fellowship.

They include

Sin

Lack of love for believers

Love of the world

False teaching about Christ

Now we are going to look at this truth from a different perspective.

But we must keep in mind that the goal is joy. Nothing has changed in the focus.

We have come to understand that there are certain **conditions that must be protected** in order to have the fellowship with God and His people that leads to joy.

Well John sums them all up in a word in Chapter 2:29

Look at verse 29.

29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

It is easy to see that the focus is on the word righteous. We might think that because John chose different words through the beginning of the book that he is talking about a different topic. But we would be missing the point if we thought that.

1 John 1:5 (NKJV)

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. (This is righteousness)

1 John 1:7 (NKJV)

7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (This is righteousness)

1 John 2:3 (NKJV)

3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. (This is righteousness)

1 John 2:15 (NKJV)

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (This is righteousness)

There is no change of topic here in verse 29. John has laid out what living righteously is. And he has shown that it is essential to **walk righteously** in order to **enjoy fellowship** with God and His people. Any straying to the right or the left of righteousness, in all its various forms, destroys the essential fellowship and the condition of joy. Unrighteousness removes the experiential benefits that righteousness provides.

But in verse 29 John connects this phenomena of fellowship with God, this thing we have looked at of **what believers are doing** and **why they are doing them**, the things **necessary to be done to have and maintain this fellowship**, he is connecting all of that to the **foundational state** that a believer **is in** that allows fellowship in the first place.

In verse 1 of chapter 3 we launch into the ocean of glory when John tells us that we are not only worshippers of God, or fellowship-ers with God, or

followers of God. No. We are **children** of God. Our true identity has dramatically and eternally changed. Who we **are**, at its very core, has changed. We will get into that more later. But that is what verse 29 is transitioning to.

Now look at verse 29 again.

29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Doesn't this seem backward to you? Wouldn't it make more sense to say that the one who is born of Him practices righteousness? Well, while that is a true statement, it is not making the point that John wants to make.

He starts with the fact that **God** is righteous. We **assume that God is righteous** if we believe Biblical teaching. Now John reasons that when a person practices the **same kind** of righteousness that God has, that righteousness came from **some source**. It is the same kind of reasoning that when you find a cabin in the woods you do not assume the chimney built it. Or if you find a turtle on top of a fencepost you don't assume it got there by itself.

There is a cause. And the cause is from God.

The truth is very simple.

If you see a person who practices righteousness, that person is born of God. Now, like always, we need to define the terms the way that scripture uses them. We are not talking about living a moral life like anyone in the world could do by their own power if they chose to do it.

We are talking about people who are conquering the evil desires in the core of their souls, the cravings of the flesh that are counter to God, no matter what the law of the land or civility might say. We are talking about winning the battle of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life.

The kind of righteousness that **a believer is practicing** is the kind of righteousness **Jesus practiced**. He is the standard of righteousness.

Essentially He was committed to doing His father's will in every situation. And He did it perfectly.

That is the kind of righteousness that true believers practice. They do not do it perfectly like Christ did. But they do it, none the less. They strive to do the right things for the right reasons. They do not care who is looking or not looking, but will invite people to look if that will help them do it. They have a desire to please God even if there is nothing to be gained for the flesh in pleasing Him. They constantly want to want to be more like Christ. They are not satisfied to be displeasing to Christ, even if their life is applauded by a watching crowd.

They want to live out the sermon on the mount, even though it is impossible to do for a non believer. In fact, the whole Christian life is impossible apart from a miracle that changes our identity, our focus, our love.

That is kind of the point of verse 29. To live in a way that **fosters fellowship with God**, to live in a way that **fosters joy in the Christian life**, to live in a way that is, well, **righteous**, requires being born again. This is what Jesus said.

John 3:3 (NKJV)

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John 3:5-8 (NKJV)

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The point here, as I understand it, is that just like the wind blows and you cannot see with your eyes what causes it, so a believer lives a new life and you cannot see with your eyes what causes it. The born again life has a **supernatural source**. That is exactly the point our text is making.

John has been telling us the things we must do to foster fellowship and ultimately joy. Now he shows us the **turbo booster** in the project. Spiritual birth into the family of God.

John is going to tell us in the rest of Chapter 3 the difference between the children of God and children of the devil. Jesus also had no trouble making those distinctions. He would tell some, "you are of your father the devil. The lusts of your father you will do." John 8:44. The contrast is those who are children of God. They are the ones with the spirit of adoption who cry out, **Abba Father**. Only these people have this family relationship with God.

Up until now John has been telling us, if you want this result, you must do this thing. If you are truly a believer you must do these things. People who are doing the opposite are liars. They do not have the identity they claim to have. And if you claim to have that identity and do not do those things, your claims are false, no matter what your sincerity or your doctrine.

Now he shows us the back side. If you are doing the things that foster fellowship and joy, there is only one explanation for it. You have been born of

God. Your whole identity has changed. You are no longer a child of the devil. Now you are a child of God.

There are places on the Appalachian trail where you walk for miles and see a side trail. And you walk on that for a while and it looks just like everything else until you come to a look out rock and you see before you all the grandeur of God's creation visible for miles and miles.

I feel like that when I read verse 29 and then cross the threshold to Chapter 3:1. I hope you are there with me right now. We are about to gaze upon the wonder of wonders once again.

¹ Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!

Behold. We mentioned this last week, but what we are called to do here is to gaze in astonishment. This goes way beyond accurate doctrine, although it is perfect doctrine. Here is a thing of astounding love and grace.

Look at what manner of love.

The word for what manner literally means "what country". In other words, look at what country this gift came from. This extravagant gift was not from France or Ireland or Israel. No this gift came from heaven. This gift came from a supernatural country.

And what kind of love is it? This love reached out to meet our needs when it is very clear that we had nothing to offer our lover. That is the position every child of God is in. There is no **worthiness** to be found in us. Only sin needing paid for and forgiven. That is truly all. If this were the marriage metaphor, the onlooker would **not** say, "what a beautiful bride. I can understand what He sees in her." No, they would say, what a benevolent husband to rescue such a unlovely woman.

We were enemies when Christ chose us. Only the word **love** can describe His motivation.

And look at the source of this salvation? Do you see any quality ascribed to the child? Do you see any hint of the child being the **chooser** of this salvation, the **determining factor** of such a thing?

No. We see the credit and it is clear. The Father gets all the credit for this loving transaction. **He** did all the bestowing. The word for bestowing is interesting. It is like He **injected** us with His love. He implanted His love in us. He did all the putting. He did all the causing. He did all the inspiring. He did all the calling. He is the prime force of our salvation.

And why?

The word “that” here really means “in order that”. He had a purpose in what He was doing that would be fully accomplished. He wasn’t **trying** to win His people to Himself. He was **accomplishing** winning His people to Himself. The Christian life is way more than a way of life that people commit themselves to. It is far more than a religion or club or society. It is a thing that is impossible for a human to join. They cannot do it. They have no capacity for it. It is like a person wanting to jump to the moon. It cannot be done. Nothing of a Christian’s life can be explained by human phenomena. It is only something that God can do. And once done, it is complete. There is no undoing it. The end that God has in mind will be accomplished. And what has God done? He has **infused** Himself into us. He has changed our Spiritual DNA. We are not the person we were before this was done. A supernatural change has happened to us that is phenomenal. In fact, it is so dramatic that there are no words to adequately describe what has happened. Do you believe it? Do you believe that you are spiritually and fundamentally different than all those around you who are not in Christ? Do you believe that you show up differently in the scanner of God than all the other blips around you that are equally human? That is really what this is talking about.

And when such a thing happens, when the new life of Christ is infused in you, when you are born of God, it is impossible that you do not take on his qualities. Just as it was impossible for our kids to not have taken on characteristics of Carla and I, although in many ways that **may not have been** a blessing, but in the same way the child of God cannot help taking on the characteristics of their father. And one of those characteristics is righteousness. So if you see something righteous, you know something about them. You know what family they are in.

Also we need to consider this from the perspective of identity. We **do** because we **are**. Being precedes doing. Pick most any epistle and you will find the doctrine of **who we are in Christ** thoroughly explained before we are commanded to do anything. Why? Because we as humans gravitate to doing. It is like a disease in us. We think, tell me what to do and I will **impress you** with what I **can do**. Give me things to do, things to accomplish, and I will show you what a good person I am, what a good Christian I have made myself to be. We think we can work our way into our identity. But there are two problems with that.

First, we will always fail to live righteously.

Second our pride will always take the credit for anything we regard as a success.

John goes about it like the other epistle writers. He tells us who we are and who gets all the credit right off the bat. We are to behold this miracle. We are to bask in the light of this beauty before we do anything. And then we are going to be **encouraged even more** to live **congruent** to the new life we have been given. We are not told to do **what we can't do** because doing it is against our natures. That is not true of us any more. We are being called to do what **we were born to do**, what our true nature is. We are to be true to our new selves in Christ, our born again identity.

Now, John does not want us to be surprised that the world is not going to buy any of this. We are going to say, I have been born of God. I am a new creature. I am a child of God. I have a new nature. And they are going to say, "Right." "There are shrinks that can help you with that problem." "You are fundamentally the same as me." "All humans are the same."

John warns us of this.

Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

The world did not ascribe Jesus as being both man and God. They did not ascribe to Him the quality of being **fundamentally different** than they were. They did not believe His claims. They did not regard Him as being the way, the truth, and the life, even though He claimed those things openly. Even so the world will not get it when we tell them about our faith, our new identity, our new life in Christ.

Now they have no reason to believe it if we do not live righteously. They have no reason to believe our claims if we handle our sexuality the same way they do, our desire for power the same way they do, our pursuit of money the same way they do, our pursuit of pleasure the same way they do, our reaction to uncomfortable circumstances the same way they do. But if we live righteously, if we live congruent to our new natures, the truth is, they **still** will not get it. But they will know when they throw their mud it will not stick. Their accusations are all false.

² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Look at the statement that John is driving home. NOW WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD.

I read this from Martin Lloyd Jones and knew I had to use it as soon as I read it because it is so true, so good.

He said, **“Or let me put it to you like this: is it not the honest truth that most of the unhappiness that we experience in this life is due to our failure to realize this truth? We are full of complaints and unhappiness. They arise partly from our own faults, partly from what others do to us or from what the world as a whole does to us. But all our unhappiness is ultimately to be traced back to this, that we are looking at the things that are happening to us, instead of looking at this vision that is held there before us. It is because we do not see ourselves as children of God and going through this life and world in the way this text indicates; that is why our unhappiness tends to get us down. We do not relate it to the whole; we do not put it in its context; we live too much with the things that are immediately in front of us instead of putting everything into the context of our standing and of our destiny.**

In the same way we must at once realize, I think, that most of our failure to live the Christian life as we should live it is also due to the same cause. If only we realized who we are, then the problem of conduct would almost automatically be solved. This is how parents often deal with this problem in instructing their children. They say to them, “Now remember who you are”. In other words it is our failure to realize who we are that causes us to stumble on this whole question of moral conduct and behavior. This objection to the stringent demands of the gospel is due to one thing only, namely that we do not realize who we are. If once we saw ourselves as we are depicted here, there would be no need to persuade us to to live the Christian life. As the next verse tells us, we would feel that we have to, it is inevitable, it is logical. The whole trouble is to be traced to a failure to realize our true greatness and position and standing.”

The question really comes down to, DO YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD?

I feel the need to add to this. There are two things that determine our behavior. Our identity and our belief. Scripture tells us this thing over and over again. The person outside of Christ cannot please God. They cannot do anything God requires. The scripture never addresses any changes or improvements to a non believer’s behavior. It does not say they should stop their immoral behavior. As an extreme example, it does not even instruct them to stop having abortions. It only tells them that they are in a wrong state and they doomed. What it **does say to them** is that every one of those people who do not know Christ must come to Christ. They must submit to Christ, surrender to Christ, and receive the salvation of Christ. When we become

absorbed in any mission that is committed to making non believers do things that believers should do, we have abandoned our mission.

Now to believers, to those who have the identity of Christ, we are told **how to behave**. But all of our behavior traces its way back to **who we are in Christ**, and what **we believe**. Our problem is not our lack of will power. It is not due to our personality. It is not due to our circumstances. Our successes or failures ultimately trace their way back to **what God has said** and **whether we believe it** or the other alternative, whether we trust **other** resources, usually our seemers.

We want to point at circumstances or people or any other thing for our faithless reactions and excuse them because what else can a human being do? But those are lies of the devil when we are truly children of God. They are flaming darts that are to be extinguished with the truth of God's word.

If we are truly a child of God, that settles everything. The implications of that truth settle everything that needs to be settled.

Now the rest of this verse may not play out like we think. **and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.**

I have read that the context for this verse does not demand a **but**. It is more likely an **and** that should be there.

A better translation with the best manuscripts would more likely read- Beloved we are the children of God and what we will be has not yet been manifested. We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

This is basically saying, here we are as the children of God. The world does not know what to make of us. They mock the very idea of what we say about our identity. We do not need to be upset.

We know that we are the children of God.

We know that we are destined for glory.

And we know something about that glory.

If you are a child of God, you will never be more of a child of God than you are at this moment. It is an in/out kind of thing. There are no degrees.

One day we will see Christ. When we see Christ, we will be like Christ. We do not know all the ways we will be like Christ. But we do know that we will be **significantly like Christ** and it will be in ways that improve everything about us.

Paul tells us more in 1 Cor

1 Corinthians 15:50-54 (NKJV)

⁵⁰ Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the

kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--

⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*"

How will it look? We don't know. But sin will be dead. There will be no more of it. Praise God. This will be wonderful. It will all be good. That is the point. Exactly how it will be we don't have all the details yet.

³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Is your life becoming more pure? Are you becoming more like Christ? Are you refusing to **know** and **think** and **do** less and less of those things that you know that Christ regards as degrading, as immoral, as sinful, as shameful.

Well when that is true it is a **wonderful evidence** that you have a hope in you that is changing you. You are believing **who you are** and you are believing what Christ has said **about you**. That is wonderful.

Do you look at your life and see that all of your life can be explained by human reactions and human attribute and human motivations? This is a call to serious repentance right now. Your life is in danger.

The call this morning is to **behold** the miracle that God has done in your life if you are a believer. To **cherish** this new identity you have been given. To **abandon** all other views of yourself. And to **live** like you are a child of God. And if you are a child of God, righteousness will be the result. It will be the fruit of your new identity.

Maybe what we ought to do this week is put a note on all the mirrors of our houses. And the note should say something like-

You are looking at a child of God. What difference does that truth make?