

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and the theme is “Love”. We need to remember clearly that it was the LOVE OF GOD for a rebellious world, and His plan to redeem and save individual people, that was the reason that He sent His eternal Son to the earth as a human baby, to grow up and live a sinless life, and to die the most unjust death imaginable. LOVE prompted the Advent of Jesus the Messiah. “For God so loved the world . . .”, John the beloved apostle wrote. And he dives deeper into this in the letter of 1 John

**NIV 1 John 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!***

Let’s walk through this Scripture and mine the nuggets that the Lord has placed there.

### **“See” or “Behold”**

I think that all the translations except for the King James Version lose the emphasis that John intended at the beginning of this verse. Some versions don’t put any stress at all on the first word. The King James version says, “Behold”, meaning “look here”, or “notice this”, or “consider this”. The NASB and the English Standard Version both say “see”, which is weaker, but the NIV and other translations ignore this word of emphasis altogether, starting the verse “how great is the love . . .”. But John’s intent is to emphasize the importance of what he’s about to say. This word translated “behold” or “look here”, is in the imperative tense. It is a word of command - “consider this!”. And it is plural – all you believers, consider . . . how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God.”

### **“How great a love” the Father has bestowed upon us**

Again, referring to the King James version, this might better be translated “behold ***what manner***” or “***what kind***” of love the Father has bestowed upon us.” The word used here can mean several types of wonder

#### a. It’s **an amazing “type” of love**

One commentator writes “the word speaks of something foreign. The translation could read ‘Behold, what foreign kind of love the Father has bestowed upon us.’ The love of God is foreign to the human race. It is not found naturally in humanity. One has suggested, ‘from what far realm? This unearthly love, . . .how other wordly’.” This manner of love is amazing in it’s type. It is the word used in Matthew 8:27 after Jesus has calmed the wind and waves with a simple command and the disciples say, “What kind of man is this?” it’s like manna – it’s something that humans hadn’t ever thought of.

#### b. It’s **an amazing “magnitude” of love**

The word also can mean what an amazing amount. It is used in Mark 13:1 when the disciples were amazed at the size of the temple and said as they were leaving, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”

Spurgeon spoke of the inability of any surveyor or astronomer to define the boundless scope of the greatness of God's love. He said:

Peer into this abyss of love. Plunge into this sea. Dive into this depth unsearchable.  
Oh, that God might direct you into the immeasurable greatness of this love!

It is an amazing type of love, an amazing magnitude of love, but Spurgeon also stresses that . . .

c. It's an **amazing "duration" of love**

Neither be thou afraid to enter into this love by remembering its antiquity. Some fight shy of the great truth of the eternal electing love of God; but to me it is as wafers made with honey. What music lies in that sentence- "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love"! When this great world, the sun, and moon, and stars, had not yet flashed the morning of their little day, the Lord Jehovah loved his people with an everlasting love. In the divine purposes, which were not of yesterday, nor even of that date of which Scripture speaks as "In the beginning," when the Lord created the heavens and the earth, God loved his own people. He had chosen you, thought of you, provided for you, and made ten thousand forecasts of lovingkindness towards you, or ever the earth was. Beloved believer, you were graven on the hands of Christ even then. Oh, that the Lord would direct you into the antiquity of his love. It shall make you greatly prize that love to think that it had no beginning, and shall never, never have an end.

This is what John the beloved apostle is saying: that this love that has been bestowed upon us is of a type and a greatness that is almost beyond comprehension.

As a matter of fact, the only way that we can accurately define "love" is to define it in terms of God's love. John tells us several more times in the rest of this book that apart from the divine revelation of divine love, humans cannot begin to grasp the meaning of "love". In 3:16 he says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His live for us". In 4:10 he says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Truly, above most of what you and I give our attention – above almost all of what amazes and awes us – the love of God looms larger and grander and more incomprehensible than anything other than Himself.

**The Father has bestowed upon us**

For some of you, the image of "father" is not necessarily a pleasant one.

Charles Francis Adams, the 19th century political figure and diplomat, kept a diary. One day he entered: "Went fishing with my son today--a day wasted." His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary, which is still in existence. On that same day, Brook Adams made this entry: "Went fishing with my father--the most wonderful day of my life!"

However, you have a higher example by which to define fatherhood – the One who has bestowed this great gift of love on us.

This love has come from the heavenly Father. This gift of divine love has come from the Supreme Source. This is no “bargain-basement”, stripped down love . . . because of its source. . . .

This love has come from God, the most Excellent  
 This love has come from God, the Perfect  
 This love has come from God, the Holy  
 This love has come from God, the Infinite  
 This love has come from God, the most Beautiful  
 This love has come from God, the Just  
 This love has come from God, the inexhaustible Fountainhead of all that is praiseworthy

And this God has declared Himself to be your FATHER! Not some sterile leader without passion and feeling, but the same Father who said

***“it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.”***

Do you feel the warmth and compassion that God has for His people? I don’t know about you, but the name of God that I love best is “Father”. Even as I wrote this, my heart was warmed and I got a lump in my throat thinking about my perfect Father and how wonderful it was to be His. What a gift to have been given the right to be God’s son or daughter!

I think that the true worth of a gift has a lot to do with who gives it. An expensive gift from a person whom you barely know doesn’t mean as much as a trifle from someone whom you know to truly love you. That’s what makes this gift even more precious – the overwhelming love of the Father who gives it.

### **How great a love the Father has bestowed upon us**

The word here translated “bestowed” is in the perfect tense, signifying as one commentator writes “that the gift becomes a permanent possession of the recipient. God has placed His love upon the saints in the sense that they have become the permanent objects of His love.” In Deuteronomy 7 and 10 Moses said that the Lord “set His love” upon Israel simply because He chose to do so. He “bestows” permanently this great gift upon us out of His fathomless love.

This is a theme that John is well familiar with. Jesus said in John 6:37 that “all that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” In verse 39 He said, “this is the will of Him who sent me that I lose none of those that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”

In John 10:29 Jesus said, “My Father, Who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”

Remember how he wrote Jesus' words from the upper room discourse in John 14-17? Jesus repeatedly referred to believers as "those whom you have given Me". God has bestowed – permanently – this great gift.

Now we know the source of the gift – the Father – and the force behind it – His love. But who is the gift for and what is the gift?

### **That we should be called children of God**

J. I. Packer, in his classic book Knowing God, writes about the amazement we should have that the likes of us have been brought into sonship with the King.

The New Testament gives us two yardsticks for measuring God's love. The first is the cross (see Rom 5:8; 1 Jn 4:8–10); the second is the gift of sonship. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" (1 Jn 3:1 RV). Of all the gifts of grace, adoption is the highest. The gift of pardon for the past is great: to know that we are [forgiven] is a never-ending source of wonder and joy.

But when you realize that God has taken you from the gutter, so to speak, and made you a son in his own house—you, a miraculously pardoned offender, guilty, ungrateful, defiant, perverse as you were—then your sense of God's "love beyond degree" is more than words can express.

Part of what makes this whole thing of adoption and sonship amazing is the consideration of just how unfit and unworthy we are. Paul said in Ephesians that we were "sons of disobedience", "strangers to the covenants of promise". The Bible tells us that we were enemies of God, without citizenship, orphans. We were un-related and unfit to be related. But John said . . .

### **That we should be called children of God**

Adopted as God's own children, with more privilege and blessing you can imagine!

Listen to Paul in Romans 8:

***those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.***

I pray this morning that the Holy Spirit is bearing witness with your spirit that you are God's child. I pray that He is opening up your understanding of the relationship and inheritance that is yours as a "co-heir with Christ".

This theme of adoption is central to the gospel. We've not just been forgiven – which would place us “un-repulsive”, we've been adopted individually as God's children. The theme of “father and child” is part of John's heartbeat as he writes – makes me wonder what kind of father Zebedee must have been. John writes in his gospel, chapter 1, verse 13, that human beings become God's children as a result of a very deliberate specific action. He calls us “**children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.**” Literally, it's “not born of blood, or of the will of the body, nor the will of a man, but born of God.” There was no other desire, drive, cause, or will that could have brought about your adoption other than the will and action of God. He chose you, specifically, to be His own.

This is such an important work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer – affirming His acceptance and love. I take it as one of my chief responsibilities to tell and show my children and my wife that I love them. I have heard people say that their father never told them that he loved them – I cannot conceive of this. My children have heard that their daddy loves them literally thousands of times. One of my most sincere hopes is that my words and actions have demonstrated to them beyond a shadow of a doubt how much I love them.

And the Lord speaks the same word through the Spirit to His children.

One of Ray Comfort's principles of evangelism is this: “If God has saved someone let Him tell them”. Some people go to great lengths to convince a person that they have been saved and accepted by God – but that isn't our work, it's God's. The apostle Paul calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of adoption” or “the Spirit of sonship.”

Can I suggest a couple of things that you should ask God for – if you don't have them – and believe that He will grant?

- Ask Him that the Holy Spirit would reveal to you the truth that you are a beloved and adopted child
  - Romans 8:15 *“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*
- Ask Him to reveal to you the magnitude of His love for you
  - Ephesians 3:17-18 *I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Some of you may have had a father like the one I mentioned earlier who made the diary entry. He may have viewed you as a nuisance – an inconvenience. Your heart wanted nothing more than to be with him – to have his attention – to be wanted, cherished, and loved. But you didn't get it.

You have another chance to be a child – this time with a perfect Father. One who is never too busy, who delights over you and provides for you and will listen to you and has made it possible for you to never be separated from His love and presence.

Well, what about you?

What is required of you to become a child of God?

## Conclusion

There are those today who believe that we are all God's children. In the sense that He is our Creator, that may be true. But we are talking about a relationship – father and child – and that relationship is not automatic. John told us very clearly in the gospel of John 1:12 "to all who received Him, to all who believed upon His name, to them He gave the power to become the children of God."

John tells us that only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are we able to be born again: to pass from the family of Adam, to which we all belong by physical birth, into a new family – the family of God. This only happens when we are born again of the Spirit of God.

Today, you must identify with Jesus' death on the cross – lay down your so-called ownership of your life. Die to your own thoughts of goodness and merit – they are a lie. Cease to trust that you are worthy of God's acceptance. Look instead to the perfect Lord Jesus and believe in Him – that when He died on the cross, He paid for your sins and bought you with the currency of His blood so that you no longer belong to yourself, but to God. This is the gospel – the good news. And when that faith and submission happens, you may know that you have become a child of God – not only forgiven and clean, but adopted and precious. And then all the storehouses of God's provision and grace are opened to you.

Are you His? Have you believed in and received Jesus Christ as Lord? If not, I beg you to believe today. Life awaits those who believe. This same apostle John writes in chapter 3:36, ***"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."***

If you are His today through faith in Jesus, celebrate. Rejoice. Meditate on the fact that your Father is the Ruler of everything.

In Psalm 62, David said, ***"One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving."*** Children of God – that is your Father. So strong that He can do anything, and full of love directed toward you.

Measure your difficulties in that light. How should you respond? You may have been an orphan – no more. You may have not known your father – no more.

Today's scripture affirms this truth and offers you the greatest identity to which you could ever aspire – Child of God. You need wish for no other.

***"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us – that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!"***

A seminary professor told of going one summer to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, to take a short vacation with his wife. One night they found a quiet little restaurant where they looked forward to a private meal—just the two of them.

While they were waiting for their meal they noticed a distinguished looking, white-haired man moving from table to table, visiting guests. The professor whispered to his wife, “I hope he doesn’t come over here.” He didn’t want the man to intrude on their privacy. But the man did come by his table.

“Where you folks from?” he asked amicably. “Oklahoma” was the answer.

“Splendid state, I hear, although I’ve never been there. What do you do for a living?”

“I teach homiletics at the graduate seminary of Phillips University.”

“Oh, so you teach preachers, do you. Well, I’ve got a story I want to tell you.” And with that he pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with the man and his wife.

The professor said he groaned inwardly: Oh no, here comes another preacher story. It seems everyone has one.

The man stuck out his hand. “I’m Ben Hooper. I was born not far from here across the mountains. My mother wasn’t married when I was born so I had a hard time. When I started to school my classmates had a name for me, and it wasn’t a very nice name. I used to go off by myself at recess and during lunch-time because the taunts of my playmates cut so deeply.

“What was worse was going downtown on Saturday afternoon and feeling every eye burning a hole through you. They were all wondering just who my real father was.

“When I was about 12 years old a new preacher came to our church. I would always go in late and slip out early. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast I got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in church on me. Just about the time I got to the door I felt a big hand on my shoulder. I looked up and the preacher was looking right at me.

“Who are you, son? Whose boy are you?”

I felt the old weight come on me. It was like a big black cloud. Even the preacher was putting me down.

But as he looked down at me, studying my face, he began to smile a big smile of recognition. “Wait a minute,” he said, “I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You are a son of God.”

With that he slapped me across the rump and said, “Boy you’ve got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.”

The old man looked across the table at the professor and said, “That was the most important single sentence ever said to me.” With that he smiled, shook their hands,

and moved on to another table to greet old friends.

Suddenly, the professor remembered. On two occasions the people of Tennessee had elected an illegitimate to be their governor. One of them was Ben Hooper.

Like Ben Hooper, knowing who you are in God's eyes makes all the difference in a life. Right after the verse we started with today, John continued and said "*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, <sup>F7</sup> we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure*".

**KNOWING THE LOVE OF GOD, IN INCREASING MEASURE, WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE AND DIRECT YOUR FUTURE.**