

The Great Love of the Father

1 John 3:1-10

Good morning and welcome to each and every one of you to worship, on this the Lord's day. What a joy and privilege it is to share once again in the Word of the Lord. It is hard to believe that we have once again entered into the season of Advent, a time of celebration, a time of joy and a time of hope. Hear the Word of the Lord from Isaiah 43 and from Isaiah 7: ***"But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour... Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."***

As we begin with preparations for Christmas, and as we look to this season of Advent, let us not forget where our true hope comes from. It is from the Lord our God – He who is Immanuel meaning God is with us. This is such a beautiful promise given to us, fulfilled in the person of Christ Jesus who reigns now in glory, and by way of the promise of the Holy Spirit fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God entered His people never to leave them.

Let us pray.

Our scripture reading this morning is taken from 1 John 3 and I am reading from verse 1 through to verse 10:

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. ⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸ The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister."

Probably, one of the most difficult things for the Christian to understand and adhere to is the command to be sinless. I am absolutely certain that if we were to be judged according to our sin, well then we all, Christians and non-Christians alike, would be doomed to face the full extent of God's wrath because of His divine justice. Over and over again, the scriptures call the believer to live a life that is blameless, to live a life free of sin. And the scriptures go as far as to outline the consequences of that sin – Isaiah 59:2 says, **“But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear”**, Romans 5:12, **“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”** or 2 Thessalonians 1:9 which says, **“They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”** and possibly Romans 6:23, **“For the wages of sin is death”** ... this is to name but a few passages which highlight the same thing. Sin leads to death and destruction and an eternal separation from God.

And in our passage this morning, the Apostle John makes it absolutely clear that sin equates to nothing short of lawlessness. Within the New Testament, this spiritually loaded term, **lawlessness**, is often used to refer to those who do not know Christ while on other occasions it refers to those who do not follow the Law of Moses. For those who are ‘lawless’, they have no place with the Lord because, as John says, they belong to the devil. In fact, John goes as far as to point out the fact that the devil has been sinning from the beginning – not the beginning as in Adam and Eve, but the beginning when he rebelled against God. This is what sin truly is, rebellion against God Himself. The scriptures often refer to the fact that the devil has, under his control, the entire world of unbelievers as John says in 1 John 5:19 – **“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”**

So, what are we to do? How is it possible for any human-being to live a sinless life? Is it even possible at all and if not, which we know to be the case, does it then mean that all people are lawless?

You see, this is the beauty of God's great love for His children, it is the beauty of His immeasurable grace. The world does not know Him which is why they cannot see Him – Yet, we know Him and have seen Him for He is in all things. In this life, one thing is abundantly clear, as scripture reminds us, *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, yet God's grace is sufficient to cleanse us from our sin. For those who are in Christ Jesus, they are being transformed and renewed. Theirs is authentic hope in what they cannot see, the true peace of Christ in them, and the grace of God which forgives those who are undeserving of forgiveness.

When John says that the children of God are sinless, what we must understand is that sin remains ever present within all people, even the believer. Now I believe that John understands this and so I want to suggest that John is not saying that the believer is capable of living sinless life, of living in sinless perfection. It is true that Christ Jesus has victory of sin and death, and that victory, through Him, is our victory as well. But this victory will not be fully realized until the day of Christ's return.

But I believe that what John is saying is that the children of God, rather than being sinless, would in fact sin less. Sin is an inevitability within the human life. And it can manifest itself in countless way ways from the

tinest of what we call 'white lies' to the gravest of inhuman and cruel actions. Often, we look at our thoughts and actions and think to ourselves, if its not hurting anyone then how bad can it be? I suggest that this is an extremely dangerous thought because it removes from us a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Yet, for the Christian life, while sin is still present, it is impossible to take sin as lightly as the world does. By the Spirit of God, we have been made aware of the dangers of sin, and more so, we have been made aware that sin has eternal consequences. But by the sacrifice of Christ Jesus, who overcame sin and death, it has no mastery over Him nor does it have mastery over the children of God. This is because, by His grace and His love, your life and my life is no longer characterized by our sin. Rather, it is characterized by Christ Himself. This is why John says in verse 2, **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.”** – the fullest realization of Christ's victory over sin, and the blessed hope of our victory and what we will be through Him has not yet been made complete. But the day will come when we will indeed realize the fullest promise of God through Christ.

And then John goes on and says, **“But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”** This is a life characterized by Christ Jesus, and with this knowledge and hope, in the great Love of God, we must strive to live a life in the fullness of His hope, the fullness of His peace, and the fullness of His grace. For by Christ, our sin is no longer counted against us, and we have been given what we do not deserve. We are being transformed into His likeness, and have been blessed by His righteousness upon us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Let us pray.

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6th December 2020