

# Behold the Love of God

a sermon in the series  
Life in the Son

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I John 3:1-3

*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.*

I really do not know how to preach this text. I found myself straining, trying to form sentences worthy of this text but the keys on my keyboard could not construct such a sentence. All I could do is what the text commanded, behold. And that's what I invite you to do with me this morning—behold the love of God. The object of our gaze this morning is deserving of our examination. We're not considering an attribute of God; we're gazing upon God Himself, for the Bible says, "God is love."

Tell me one thing more desirable to look upon. There is nothing. The first sentence of this first verse is not a question, it's a statement of amazement. It's a command to come see and examine the love of God.

The literal translation is best rendered this way, "Look at what sort of love, the Father has given to us!" John seems to be beside himself. I think not even divine inspiration could help the aged apostle put into the straight jacket of human language the glory of this subject. Language is too constraining to describe the marvelous majesty, the breathtaking beauty, the peerless power of the love of God. All you can do is behold.

That's what I want us to do this morning. I want you to look at the love of God for you. Behold in amazement, behold in adoration, behold in adulation, behold in awe the love of God.

First I want to direct your attention to,

## **I. The Command to Behold the Love of God**

We should be pulled into the subject like a magnet drawing in a pin, but we're not. There is a considerable risk that we will not behold His love. I say that because the Apostle John commands

his readers to do so. This is the God of all creation and the nature of His love and yet you're *commanded* to behold Him. You would think it be easy for us to do even right here in such an atmosphere as this. But not so.

He's not directing us to the wrath or justice of God, and He's not directing us to behold God's terror. I could understand why those would be difficult to behold and why we would refrain and pull back in horror at the terror of God's judgment. But it's not those qualities of God that John is directing us to see. He's telling us to go to the very heart of God, a heart so tender, so affectionate, a heart of pure love, love divine. Surely I don't need to be told to do that. But, yes I do. I need to be told to direct my heart to behold the love of God.

## **Why the Command?**

There are two reasons why. The first reason we're commanded to behold the love of God is because the love of God is too daunting, too intimidating. How many of you are ready to run right to a task you know you cannot do? You know before you begin you will not be able to complete the task. How many are willing to volunteer?

This past month of May, four experienced mountain climbers died trying to summit and descend Mount Everest. These were experienced climbers. And if experienced climbers died trying to climb the world's tallest mountain, do you think I'm going attempt to Mount Everest? Of course not, it would be certain death. One doesn't attempt jobs or projects he or she cannot complete.

How do you begin to take in and drink the infinite ocean of God's love?

*Oh the love of God so rich and pure,  
How measureless and strong.*

How do you begin to let your soul be filled with that kind of love? It's too big, it's too daunting, so there is a tendency to say to ourselves, *I know the love of God, I know God loves me* and be satisfied.

That's why I believe there is a command. I believe there is something in us that makes us say, *I can't take this. Why even try? My puny little brain cannot compute on such a level.* Yet John says, "behold."

There is a second reason.

The love of God is so humbling. When you get a good look at God's love for you, you are always brought down. You are humbled. You are not brought down in a bad or negative way, but you are brought down to an accurate assessment of who you really are and it's the very opposite of our pride. Our pride doesn't want to be humbled. Do you hear me? Let me say the word again, our pride. Self does not want to be humbled. The love of God is the very antagonist of pride. So as a believer, I have to be commanded to look upon the love of God. That's the remedy to your pride.

Are you too proud to come to Jesus this morning? Are you too proud to surrender your life and to entrust yourself to His care? Let me throw to you the lifeline of hope today. It is the love of God. Look at it and your pride will melt like a snow in May. It will melt away. So I ask you, I command you in the name of Jesus, look upon God's love for you and be humbled today.

### **To Behold the Love of God is Life-giving**

When I have been offended, to look upon the love of God causes me to forgive. When I've sinned and feel I cannot come to God, so full of shame and guilt, all I need to do is behold the love of God and no shame or guilt can bar my way—it's life-giving.

To behold and look upon the love of God in Christ Jesus gives you life. When you feel as if your spouse is not treating you with the honor or love you're due, all you need to do is look at the love of God and your heart will go out to him or her. When your heart is calloused and filled with the things of this world, all you need to do is look at the love of God and be reminded that you are playing with trinkets when you could be enjoying a banquet. I will say without any fear of being contradicted that beholding the love of God is the remedy to all of your needs, all of your sins.

Let me direct your attention to,

## **II. The Manner of the Love of God**

What other kind of love, or whose love other than God's, could love us like this? What kind of love is the love of God? The only way to begin to answer that question is to first know who you are. I see this in the text. I know it's true by experience, but the text first stated it before I ever experienced it. Notice what John is doing here in verse one.

*“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.”*

Do you see the contrast?

### **What Kind of Love is God's Love?**

Look at the nature, the manner of God's love that YOU should be called a child of God. The only way to grasp God's love for you is to really see whom it is God loves. That's the point here of this verse. Well then, who are we? We are that sad lot of Adam's offspring. We are descendants of the betrayer; we are of that rebel force called humanity. That's who we are.

We are the very ones who, instead of celebrating our King, denounced Him. We have rejected His rule. Sin is not just a violation or transgression of a commandment, no; it is rebellion against the Kingship of Christ over your life.

That's whom God says He loves. This is the kind of love that can love its enemies. Would you look in your Bible to Romans, the fifth chapter and there it is clearly shown who we are, and thereby discern what kind of love God has.

*“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6).”*

What kind of strength is the apostle referring to? The strength to lay hold of the righteousness of God. God declares, “Be ye holy as I am holy.” Who of us can do this? We're without that kind of strength and yet while we were without that kind of strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

There you are. There's your description—the epitaph for each one of us, the ungodly.

*“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:7-8).”*

It's not just love for you, but it's love demonstrated to you.

*“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Romans 5:9-10).”*

How do I understand the love of God? Well, first I have to understand who I am. I am not by nature inclined to love God. I am by nature inclined to hate God. God loves those who hate Him. Now what kind of love is this? Divine. It is not manufactured in your heart; it is the nature of God.

For you and I to love like this, the nature of God has to be deposited in us. That's the Gospel. You've been partaker, a sharer of the divine nature, which is love.

But God doesn't just love His enemies. He calls us children.

## **God Calls us His Children**

He calls those who were once enemies, children. That's what the text says.

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

Not only does He love us, but He loves us enough to call us His children. Sons of God. It's at this point I begin to stumble and wrestle. I've always had difficulty calling myself 'son of God' and the reason should be obvious—it's the very title of Jesus.

*“And the high priest answered and said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!” 64 Jesus said to him, “It is as you said (Matthew 26:63b-64a).”*”

We’ve been given the same title of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been given the name above every other name. Given the name ‘son’. I can’t put the definite article in front of it, I have to put the indefinite, ‘a son of God.’ There’s something in me that says ‘the’ belongs to Jesus, ‘a’ belongs to me, but nonetheless, I share the same title as Christ. What kind of love is this, that He would take His very enemy and now not only bring Him into His family but bequeath, bestow, give you the title of ‘child of God’?

I know your brain is having difficulty to believe but my friend, doesn’t that prove the majesty of the love of God, how big it is that He could love like that? Yes it does. Instead of being doubters, believe that God could love like this.

But it doesn’t stop there. The love of God has no end. John could have continued and we could never have exhausted it all. He goes on to say that,

### **God Makes us Children Indeed**

He doesn’t just call you a child, He makes you a child. We are called the children of God. In verse two, John reaffirms and states that we are not just called the children of God, we are the children of God. Why make this point? Look at verse two,

*“Beloved now we are children of God.”*

Some translations add the words, “and we are” in verse one,

*“That we should be called the children of God, **and we are.**”*

The translators of these translations believed the three additional words are actually in the Greek. It is one thing to be *called* the child of God, it’s another thing to *be* the child of God. Titles are very important. The President of the United States is a very important title to have. I treasure the word *pastor*. I love it not because it speaks of authority but because it speaks of a shepherd and that’s an important title.

But then there are some titles that are quite deceptive, where people actually embellish their positions and their titles sounds more important than the work done.

Let me give you a few examples. There are companies who have actually advertised for these positions in order to attract people to come and submit applications:

One company advertised for a, *Public Sanitation Engineer*, which was nothing more than a garbage collector.

How about this one: the company wanted a *Vision Clearance Engineer*. The job offered was a windshield replacer. One very similar to this posted by another company was an *Optical Illuminator Enhancer*. The position was none other than a window cleaner.

Or this one, *Business Communications Conveyor*. The position they were trying fill was a courier.

One company posted for a *Surface Hydro-Maintenance Technician*. That sounds very impressive. It sounds like someone with an engineering degree and is going to be working on some sophisticated piece of machinery. The actual position was, a janitor.

Sometimes titles can be deceptive, and the title 'a son of God' can at first seem deceptive when you look at how you perform. When you look at your track record, the title 'a son of God' sometimes seems to be a little too embellished, over-stated or exaggerated.

It seems deceptive because we often act contrary to our sonship. How many times has a parent said to a misbehaving child, and I might add wrongly: "You don't act like a child of mine."

Well I must confess at times I don't act like a child of God. I sometimes don't act like my Father's child and the title 'a son of God' seems a bit too exaggerated, but John knew that we would struggle believing the title, and so he said "and we are". Don't doubt it, even though sometimes your track record disputes the title.

Let me assure your heart that you are dealing with infinite love far greater than who you are. A love that can love you just the way you are. Let me testify by personal experience that I've not been the best son God has ever adopted and brought into His family. I've served Him more than 25 years and I know there have been many seasons of rebellion, many seasons where pride has motivated me to be other than obedient, but I want you to know that I'm still His son and His love for me endures today because He doesn't love me for what I do, He loves me because that's His heart. He loves me because of what Jesus has done for me. He loves me because I am His child. If a parent can love their children, even when they are disobedient, then how much more the Father of Infinite love? So yes, you can come and He will receive you.

Come right now. Believe upon Him right now and you will be saved. I bid you one more time, behold the love of God! Look at what kind of love is offered to you this morning. Quit rejecting that love! Let your pride be melted and receive the love of God. In order to receive the love of God you have to be humble and surrendered.

### **III. The Work of the Love of God**

First of all the love of God is:

#### **A Transformation**

Look at the last part of verse one again,

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

Something happens to people when they get saved. Something happens and the world no longer recognizes the new Christian. You're not the same person once converted. Friends begin to drop off. 'I don't enjoy you, you're too straight. There's too much light about you.'

The world doesn't like us, why? Because it didn't know Him and because we're starting to look like Him, the world rejects us. Something happens the moment you receive the love of God—you are transformed by it. Once a child, always a child. If saved means to you professing faith in Christ and getting baptized, then don't put any stock in 'once saved, always saved,' because you have a false definition of salvation to begin with.

But if you believe that God's love is transforming you into a child of God and literally doing something to you that changes who you are, then let me tell you that once born into the family you'll never be unborn. A transformation takes place, but it doesn't stop. The love of God continues.

## **A Continued Transformation**

*“We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2b).”*

There is an acknowledgment in this verse that we are not like our Father yet. We don't know what we're going to be like so that means I'm not there yet. There is still more change to take place. So why must there be continued transformation?

Reason one: the Father is not content with where you are today.

The Father loves you so much that He cannot be happy where you are right now even though you may be. How many of you are content with your Christian life? Be warned that contentment is a very bad sign in the Christian life. There is a godly contentment and that deals with material things we possess, but spiritual contentment is an evil to avoid.

There is something in the heart of every child of God that says, *Lord, I have to have more. I'm not satisfied, I've drunk from the well and the well is good, but surely there is more where this came from. I want more.* If you're not satisfied with what you know of Him or how much you've experienced him, let me tell you the Father is not content either, He has better plans for you.

The Bible says the very purpose for which you were saved is,

*“We were predestined to be conformed to the image of God that He might be firstborn among many others.”*

So the Father's emphasis is to make you like His Son, until then the Father is not content. We don't know what we will be, but we know we can't remain the way we are now because the Father will have His sons look like Him.

And what father among us doesn't want his sons to be like him? There is something in our DNA that wants us to be able to look at our children and be able to say 'I'm going to live on beyond this life in my children.'

I believe there is something in the heart of God that says, 'I want my children to look like Me.' Not in the way that I would want my children to look like me, but in a perfect, holy, loving way, because to be like God is absolutely pure love and divine excellence. It's God wanting His best for you.

There is a second reason for continual transformation and it's not only because the Father is not content, but we are not content with who we are. We're not content. It's this dissimilarity between us and my Father that grieves us.

I'm a walking paradox, that's the only way I know how to explain this to you. There is a part of me rejoicing in God, although fighting to do so some days, struggling but getting there most often. But there is another part of me that just is sorrowful with who I am, and what I do or don't do.

I'm grieved by how unlike my Father I am, even on my best days. You know, I experience the presence of God and right now I am experiencing the presence and help of the Lord in trying to preach a text I found impossible to preach. God has given me some measure of help, but do you know that even right now there is grief in my heart. Grief because I know I am not a perfect example of what I am preaching to you. There is this feeling that I don't measure up and the truth is I don't. There's something in me that says I want more, I want to be like my Dad. I want to grow up and be like my Father.

## **The Believer's Part in the Transformation**

God is also working in the Christian to will and to do, to work out his salvation as a part of God's greater work.

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

So, a true child of God, because of the dissimilarity between he and his elder Brother and his Father, is always striving for holiness. Fails often, but strives nonetheless. Not perfection, but striving is the goal.

What I want you to see is the basis of the appeal to purify yourself. We have already acknowledged our desire for this. Those who have been saved know there is more sin and corruption down deep that needs a Savior. The Word of God reminds us of our need for holiness and tells us that



without it we will not see the Lord. Therefore, the New Testament commands us to obey. It tells us to stop certain behaviors and to replace them with new behaviors. The Bible commands us to purify ourselves, and to work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

John has told us this already. In chapter two, he declares that we know Christ if we keep His commandments. If we say we have fellowship with Him and do not practice the truth we lie .

He's already said this is what a believer does—he walks in the light, he obeys God, he fights sin. So what's the basis of my obedience?

Listen closely. In the New Testament, the basis of our conduct is never law, but our position. That's what he does in verse three,

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

Because I am a child of God, God has transformed and is transforming me. I'm going to be like Him someday. That is foundation and basis for why I now will do all I can to fight against my flesh and bring it in submission to the glory of God. Not because I have to, but because of who I am. The Apostle John appeals for holy conduct based upon who we are, children of God. This is so crucial.

I never come to the Word of God looking for a recipe to holiness. I look to the Word of God for Christ and His promises, which my faith in Him can experience, because I am already a child of God.

I'm not trying to be a child of God, I already am a child of God and this is the basis for my living holy. So many churches have it completely reversed. They approach the Bible, obedience and holiness with the hope that they can attain and finally one day be good enough.

Listen please, that is a perversion. A demonic perversion of the blessed, holy Word of God. God doesn't give you His law so that you might measure up to it and be acceptable, He first accepts you and makes you His child so that you can now live as His child.

This Book becomes nothing but a mirror we look in and see what Jesus looks like, and the more we behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, we are transformed from glory to glory. The love of God works that way.

Behold the love of God. What kind of love? Well, I'm trying to give you some inkling of an idea of what kind of love this is.

*The love of God is greater far  
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;  
It goes beyond the highest star,  
And reaches to the lowest hell;  
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,  
God gave His Son to win;  
His erring child He reconciled,  
And pardoned from his sin.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above,  
Would drain the ocean dry.  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

Today that is the love of God that is poured out upon you by the Holy Spirit that is in you.

Dear child of God, if you're struggling, wondering whether it is true even after your rebellious season if God still loves you. Let it be known. Look at it now. Look at it in the face of Jesus. Look as He anguishes under your burden of sin. Look at the love of God as He writhes in pain. Not just the pain that men inflicted upon Him, but also the pain of God Himself.

Look at Him as He stretches upon the nail-pierced feet as He pulls Himself up for the air to breathe in order to express His love to those who crucified Him, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." If today you question whether God loves you, look to the cross of Calvary. Do you question whether God will get you through to the end? Do you question whether or not you'll persevere to the end? How can you question the love of God in Christ Jesus? Behold what kind of love wherewith He has loved you and be at peace.

My friend, one of the great privileges of being a pastor is I get to invite people to look at the love of God and to receive it. Would you do so right now? Don't wait for altar calls. Do it right now in your heart. Reach out to God and say, "Yes, yes God. Love me. Here I am and here's my heart. Pour out your love by the Holy Spirit. Give all that my heart can contain and then some." He will do it.

Oh the love of God, that we should be called children of God! That God today will make you His child through the work and effort of Jesus Christ, this I pray. Amen.