**THE FATHER’S LOVE**

**1 John 3:1–10**

**Key Verse: 3:1a**

**“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”**

Happy New Year! Can you believe that it is already 2015? I feel like 2005 was not too long ago (For context, Jonathan was 2 years old and Youtube was launched), but that was ten years ago. It really is hard to believe how another year flew by so fast and we are here at the last Sunday of 2014.

In this last Sunday of the year, we are studying this passage because it is a beautiful, complementary passage during this Christmas season. We are going to think about God’s love. We are going to think about how great God's love is. How vast it is. How beautiful it is. How personal it is. How intimate it is. We have never seen God or known him face-to face, so how can we truly understand and experience God’s love then? Well, that’s why the title of the message is “The Father’s Love”. John wanted to explain to us from the point of view of someone who has personally experienced God as our Father through Jesus Christ. As a new father, I can honestly say that I now have a tiny understanding from the point of view as a child and the point of view as a father.

Additionally, we are studying this passage today as our prayer for the young people at The Well retreat, since Kathy is giving a message on the same passage there. For us, we want to think about how we can communicate this love to the young people that we know in our own lives. The passage is a reminder of how we can be examples of being children of God by loving others as we love ourselves.

May God help us to see and experience our Father God’s love for each one of us. May God help us to hold onto this love and pursue the purity that is in not sinning. May God help us to be like Jesus in imitating this love to the many lost and broken people today.

**Part I. What does it mean to See the Father’s Great Love for Us**

Before we dive into the passage, it is helpful to understand the context of 1 John. 1 John was a letter written by the author of John’s gospel, John the apostle. It was written to the early churches after the death and resurrection of Jesus to squash the false teachings about God’s incarnation as the human Jesus. John wanted to clearly testify that God did indeed come to this world in the flesh. John also wanted to clearly testify about the relationship we have with God through His humanity and what we ought to do as Christians in fellowship with Jesus (1 John 1:1-4). Then in 1 John chapter 3, John repeats what having a loving fellowship with God means.

Let’s start by reading verse 1a altogether up to “…what we are”. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” John the apostle begins this passage with exclamations: To **see** what great love our Father God has for us and tosee why our Father God has such great love for us. John exclaims to us to look at the Father’s love, to think about the Father’s love, and deeply accept it in our hearts! So what does it mean to see what the Father’s great love is? Originally in Greek, the word “eido” was translated to the word “see” in this passage. It literally means to perceive with the eyes, perceive with our senses, to understand, to notice, discern, discover, pay attention to, observe, examine, behold, experience, and many more layers of how the word “see” means here. (repeat). John was writing this letter to tell the early churches the great love our Father God has given us through his own life as Jesus' disciple.

Then why does our Father God have such great love for us? It is because we are His Children. It is because God willingly became a human being to show how much he loves us. He shared the physical limitations we have. He was a helpless baby and grew up experiencing childhood. He enjoyed the satisfaction of eating good food and also the pains of hunger. He experienced human parental love as a child with Joseph and Mary, but also betrayal by the disciple that he unconditionally loved like his own child. Ultimately, he experienced and took upon all the sins and pains of humanity by suffering immeasurably on the cross and dying. Romans 5:8-10 says, “8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” We were once God’s enemies, but it seems unfathomable that we have been forgiven and reunited with God through Jesus and are called his children! Thank God!

Before Eliot was born, I saw my friends, cousins, and in-laws having babies over the past several years. I would see these babies and see how cute they were, but since they were not my children, it was hard for me understand the parental, sacrificial love that were given to them. They tell me how their lives have changed forever for the better and how joyful it is. Yet I’ve only heard how “tired they are all the time”, how parenting is a “24/7 job”, and that it is “hard work”. It got me more scared than hopeful. But then Eliot was born. And I can honestly say that fatherhood is one of the greatest joys I have ever experienced. I can’t get enough of how cute he. I can’t get enough of his smile, giggles and laughs. I can’t get enough of his adorable little hands and feet. The sleepiness and the so-called-24/7 job is so trivial compared to how much of a blessing he has been to Rebecca and our families. Likewise, just as knowing and understanding what a Father’s love is for his child, we can understand as God’s children, His love for each one of us.

All this sounds like something that we can understand in our heads, but how can we understand the Father’s love and practice it in our daily lives? Look at verse 1a again. In Greek, the word love used here is agape. Agape love is not a feeling, but of action. It is loving another person for the sake of love without expecting anything in return. Also, agape literally means love feast. Isn’t that so cool and amazing? We have a feast when want to enjoy fellowship with our friends and family, when we celebrate the people we love around us, and just to have good company. And that’s what God wants to do with us as our Father. John is telling us that God the Father wants to sit down next to us and have a feast with us as His sons and daughters! He wants to have communion with us as his children and Him as God the Father and with Jesus the Son. God calls to have an intimate fellowship with us. 1 John 1:3 says, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

To live in this intimate fellowship with our Father God, we must confess our sins, walk in the light, love one another as we love ourselves and as Jesus one-sidedly loved us. We must depend on the grace of our Lord Jesus and forgive one another endlessly. Yes, endlessly. That means every day, or else, we are in darkness. We must forgive that person who cut in front of me in the super long line at Target. We must forgive our friends and family who might say and do hurtful things. This is not easy to do and we must depend on Jesus to do it. 1 John 1:6-7 says, “6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 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, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

May God help us to see what great love the Father has given us! May God help us to love one another as ourselves, so that we can understand and experience the intimate fellowship with our Father God.

**Part 2. Our Identity as the Children of God**

In verses 1 and 2, John shares with us that God calls us His children. Can it be? And how can it be? In our hearts, we harbor and act on our anger, jealousy, hatred, pride, greed, lust, envy, deceit and many other sinful thoughts that has separated us from our Father God. I get very angry when someone who drives recklessly near me on the highway and all kinds of bad words come out of my mouth including bad hand gestures. I walk around my neighborhood and envy living in one of those million dollar homes. At work, I’ve learned a lot about my new coworkers from other coworkers complaining and slandering about each other behind each other’s backs. So as sinful human beings, we don’t live like the Children of God. In America, democracy and capitalism teaches us to strive for the American dream. It’s having that well-paying job, that dream house with a backyard, 2-car garage, and 2.5 kids. But it’s not really dream because we then worry about sending our children to the best schools, being able to pay for our children’s college education and saving up enough for retirement in Florida. This is the dream of why so many people immigrate to the United States for. We are so worried about our human problem, how can be called the Children of God or act like children of God?

We don’t behave like God’s children and yet God still calls us His Children because of his love for us and He demonstrated that through Jesus. This is our identity as His Children. Our identity is that we are unconditionally loved. Our identity is that we are blessed beyond what we deserve because of our sinful ways. Let's look at verse 2 and 3. “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. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” John teaches us that when we become a child of God, we have the hope to be more like Jesus. Jesus becomes our defining identity. As verse 3 says, all who have this hope pursue purity against sin. Just as Jesus is pure, who was born without sin, those who have the hope of having an intimate fellowship with God strive to do what is right. Purifying themselves means to fight against the sins in our lives. Galatians 3:26-28 says, “26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

May God help us to pursue purity and do what is right because we are forgiven and have the privilege to be called the Children of God.

**Part 3. How do we live as the Children of God?**

In verses 4-10, John the apostle warns the children of God not to keep on sinning. It is because sin is lawlessness. When we live in lawlessness, we don’t obey God’s commands and we don’t behave like the children of God, but instead we follow wickedness. Continuing to sin means that we either know that we are sinning and just don’t care, or deceive ourselves thinking that we are not sinners. Most importantly, those who keep on sinning cannot see Jesus. It completely destroys what John shares with us in verse 1 of being able to see what great love the Father has given to us and experiencing the joys of being our Father God’s child. 1 John 1:8-10 says, “8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”

But Jesus helped us through his death and resurrection on the cross. Our sins are forgiven and he cleanses us from our sins and sets us free from our sins. 1 John 2:2 says, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” Jesus being the atoning sacrifice means that we all are the ones that should have died on the cross for our sin, but instead Jesus did that for all of us. We must remember this, understand this, and deeply accept this. When we do so, we can stay in fellowship with Jesus.

Look at verses 7-10. As dear children of God, John also warns us of those who may lead us astray. John wants us to be aware and be alert of who is influencing us. People think that he or she is independent and make his own choices, but in reality we are all influenced one way or another. We are tempted to sin all the time. The devil is subtly, but relentlessly, crouching at our door. The devil is telling us to yell at that person who is driving too slow or be jealous of another person who is smarter. The devil is telling us to despise those who do not meet our own personal standards. But through Jesus, we can overcome this sin problem and we have our creator on our side. 1 John 2:1 says, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” And we must speak through our actions, not just say that we are not sinners and let that be it and do nothing else.

Can we all read verse 10 together? Verse 10 says, “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.” May God help us to love one another as ourselves and practicing our fellowship with God as His children. May God help us to love our young people as ourselves through depending the Jesus’ grace and through patient prayer.