

## God's Children: The Assurance of Our Unknown Future

3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. of Easter – 04/18/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 John 3:1-7 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 2, “**Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.**”

### Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ Who are you? And what difference does that make both now and in the future? Today I'd like to explore the Apostle John's answer to this question using two illustrations that might seem at first like they have nothing to do with each other – rockets and birth.

### I. A Distinction of Identities

✘ But first, we need to get a handle on an important distinction that John makes for us regarding our identity. He answers the first question that I asked in verse one. Who are we? We are (present tense) “children of God”.

→ But he clears up an extremely common misunderstanding about this designation right from the start. You see, it is not true, as we hear people both within the church and out in the world declare and agree to so readily, that “all people are children of God”. That false statement is just assumed and accepted by almost everyone. But it is not true according to God's own Word.

✘ John says that one's identity as “child of God” is based upon the fact that God has made us His children. He shows that it is based in His very special love; love that is shown in His Son Jesus and His saving work in our place. Only in this way does He “give” us the distinction by grace.

→ As to who all people are, Paul answers that in Ephesians 2:3, saying that we “were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind”. That means that we all deserve to receive God's righteous and eternal wrath and condemnation against sin because all of us – every one of us – is a sinner to the core.

✘ But now God has made us His children as a free and undeserved gift. You and I can't choose it for ourselves any more than we can choose our earthly family of origin when we are born.

→ You see, I'm a Besel by birth, because Arthur W. Besel was my earthly father. Before my conception, God didn't offer me a list of families and/or names that I could choose from. It's just who I am.

→ Likewise, at my baptism, I became a child of God because God gave me the gift of new birth into His family and connected me to Himself through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus in that miraculous and saving work. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ John recognizes that there is an important contrast that exists among us now because of Christ. He says at the end of verse one that “the world does not know us” now that we are children of God.

→ Why? because it does not know God! That's why we can't say that all people are children of God, because the majority of those in the world have rejected the Father's free gift of forgiveness – they have refused to believe in Jesus and His saving work on their behalf. They are not children of God by their own doing!

→ So if they do not know the Father, then John says they do not “know us”. This is the “disadvantage”, if you want to call it that, of us being children of God today.

- ✘ But verse two describes for us the far weightier advantage of being a child of God. The first is identified by the beginning word in verse two. We are “beloved” – that is loved by God with a love that is so far above any love that our human existence can ever truly comprehend.
  - ➔ Think just of God’s love shown in sending His Son Jesus to suffer and die for us sin-filled rebels. Think of the greatest love that you can...and then multiply it a thousand fold and you still only scratch the surface of how deeply God the Father loves you folks.
- ✘ Beyond that, John says that we have a future that is truly out of this world. It is an intimate connection formed and solidified in our baptism; a connection to the resurrected and reigning Christ Jesus wherein He has saved us, cleansed us, redeemed us of all guilt and sin and now protects and cares for and holds us in His loving arms forevermore.
  - ➔ John says that we will “see Him as He is”. Job 19:26-27 says, “After my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold”. This is the promise of seeing Jesus when He appears again in the flesh; when He gathers all believers together in the final resurrection. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

## II. Faith in Our Unknown Future

- ✘ What John is doing here is taking us through the various stages of our lives as children of God. This is where I think of a connection with most of our modern rockets that we send into space – whether it is to deploy satellites or deliver supplies to the space station.
  - ➔ Most rockets, when launched, go through multiple stages. At some point after the initial liftoff, the rocket divides, leaving one part behind to disintegrate or be recovered while the rest enters into a new trajectory and phase. Often this process occurs again into a third phase.
- ✘ In some respects our Christian lives resemble a multiple-phase rocket: the first phase is from conception to birth; the second phase is from birth to death; and the third phase is from death into eternity.
  - ➔ Just as there is a critical point in the progress of a rocket where it must successfully transition from one phase to the next for the rocket to complete its mission, so there is a critical point in our human lives where a certain phenomenon must occur for us to attain God’s goal and mission for us.
  - ➔ At some time in the second phase – and the earlier the better – a human being needs to experience what we call conversion where we go from children of wrath to children of God. Having been born already in the flesh, you and I needed to be “born again” (Jn. 3:3) – that’s the Bible’s way of describing this critical stage.
  - ➔ Having gotten bodily life, each person needs to receive spiritual life as well, or else the whole process fails and that person fizzles out into eternal death.
- ✘ The success of the second and third phases depends 100% upon that person, at some point, coming to faith in Christ as Savior. Today, you and I are now in the second phase of our multiple-phased existence. Each of us has successfully undergone conversion.
  - ➔ As John says in verse two, “Beloved, we are God’s children now”. The Holy Spirit has come to us in water and Word, applied the saving work of Jesus upon us, along with the gift of faith, and given us this glorious status. But remember, this is only the second phase.
- ✘ The final phase still lies ahead. As glorious as this phase from womb to tomb is, the phase ahead is far more glorious, so much so that it staggers the imagination. Nothing we know today can even compare with the final stage, which is of course our time in heaven.

- In the middle of verse two John says, “what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is”. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
- ✘ John says that “we know” this. But how much of it do we really know? How much of it can we know until we leave this earthly phase and enter into our final future in glory?
    - Since so much of that part of our future is unknown, many allow it to lead them into doubt or even unbelief. Questions begin to surface: How can a person live forever? Maybe the grave really is the end.
  - ✘ Well, perhaps we can look more confidently at our final phase by looking back at the transition we’ve already been through, from the first phase to where we’re at today.
    - During that nine month existence before we were born, none of us could have ever fathomed what we know and understand now today, right?
  - ✘ Let’s say, for example, that during our time in the womb we had the capacity to think and hope and so on. And let’s say that while we were there, we received word that another life laid before us; a life that might last the incredibly long time of 80 or 90 years.
    - That new world, we’re told, would contain light in which we could see things, with vast reaches of space where we could fully stretch our arms and legs in all directions to their fullest extent. That world would contain towering skyscrapers, majestic mountains, strange looking quadrupeds called animals, large plants called trees and four-wheeled vehicles that could travel at shocking speeds.
    - Beyond our comprehension, we would be told that someday we would be able to do the impossible – things like walk and talk and interact with others like ourselves.
    - Yet strangest of all would be the manner that we would enter into this new world, through a rather perilous process called birth; one that involved pain, danger, doctors, and hospitals; yet a process that would thrust us into such a beautiful life as we live in right now today.
  - ✘ What reaction might an unborn child have in response to this talk of another, more abundant life? Even though that baby couldn't possibly understand what earthly life would be like, would he still believe in it and look forward to it, or would he assume that the dark and cramped quarters of his current existence was the entire meaning of life; that there was nothing more?
    - But then comes the day - the day of birth, and it all turns out to be true. There is another life; one that is far more wonderful; far beyond what could even be imagined while he lived in the womb!
  - ✘ Hopefully you’re beginning to see where John is trying to take us this morning. Our present existence folks is not the pinnacle of life. It is merely one phase in our journey.
    - In relation to the heavenly life to come, we might as well be infants, still developing and preparing for birth. Why?
  - ✘ Because we have it on good authority – that is, from God's own Word - that there is another life, another world, ahead of us called heaven. There we will live unbelievably long – forever!
    - It is a world without space or time. Angels will share God’s mansions with us, and wonder of wonders – we will behold the very face of God. We will see Him as Father and Son – side by side on the throne – “as He is”.
    - John even says in verse two that “we shall be like Him”. All the ills and inconveniences of this present life, the worst of which is sin, will have vanished. All will be perfect in every way.

- Strangest of all is the mode of entering this future world. It is a dreaded and painful process called death; a process involving undertakers, caskets, tombstones, and bodily decay; a process we would never guess could thrust us into such a beautiful life as the glories of heaven.
- ⊗ Best of all, the important parts of this second phase will not be left behind to disintegrate. No, the capsule of the second phase – that is our body – is recovered and restored. Yes, there is a resurrection from death, because Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

## Conclusion

- ⊗ Obviously, you and I can't conceive of this new life any more than an unborn child can imagine life on earth.
- But we can believe in it and hope for it. We can “know” it with certainty because it has been promised and proclaimed in our Father's Word.
- Luther said of this hope, “We speak of a living hope, that is a hope in which we may hope with certainty and be sure of eternal life. But this is still concealed. It is still covered with a cloth. One does not see it. At present it can be grasped only with the heart and through faith” (*Luther's Works*, 30:11).
- ⊗ “See” it friends; “see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (v.1).
- Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*