

I Am A Child (Part 1a)

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] So for a wee while I'd like us to turn back to the passage that Murder Read for us from 1 John Chapter 2 and then into chapter 3. Now my routine is all a wee bit all over the place this weekend.

A couple of weeks ago in our evening services, we began a series called the Christians Identity and that is going to continue to be our evening series. Apart from today and maybe next week. The reason we've swapped it is because last week I was asked to preach in Barvis tonight to cover for Murdo, who's on paternity leave because of the wonderful safe arrival of his little boy Matthew. So I'm going to be in Barvis tonight and I had prepared to preach this evening on this service. So Phil very kindly agreed to swap with me and Phil will be looking at John's Gospel tonight. So our routine is swapped over for this week. We're doing our evening service in the morning, our morning service in the evening. So that's my first mistake in terms of time. Second one is that we were going to look at the topic that we're going to look at today.

I was going to do it all today, but I've got too much to say. So we're going to split it over two weeks and we'll do half this morning and half next week.

[1 : 17] And I'll explain why that is in a moment. I want to start by reading again verses 1 to 2 of 1 John 3. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, for so we are.

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. 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.

As we think about our identity as Christians, our title today is I am a child. And as I said, I want to split this over two weeks. And one of the reasons for that is that I think it's maybe safe to say that of all the things that we're going to look at in this series, I think this is the most important and this is the truth that we've to really press home into our hearts.

So we're going to look at this this morning and we'll look at it next Sunday morning and then we'll return to our normal morning evening routine. This is maybe a good time to say that for those of you who don't manage along in the evenings, we'd love to see you come to our evening services.

So if you are able to come, that would be amazing. Please always know that you're so welcome at our evening services as well. We introduced this topic a couple of weeks ago and the Christians identity and as we did that, we highlighted two controversial claims and one crucial diagram that are going to be foundational to this study that we're doing over the coming weeks.

[2 : 58] The controversial claims are this, one, it's possible for your understanding of your own identity to be wrong.

It's possible for your understanding of your identity to be wrong. Now that's controversial because that goes very much against how our culture speaks today. We saw that when we looked at this together that our culture that I understand today thinks very much that my identity, the core of my identity is what I think of myself.

My understanding of my identity in other words is the bottom line. It's infallible. And in this whole series, we are trying to actually push back against that and to say, no, it's possible for that to be wrong for the way that we understand ourselves.

It's possible. So that's the first controversial claim. The second controversial claim is one that applies especially to us in terms of our faith and it's this. Not only is it possible for your understanding of your identity to be wrong, it's highly likely that your understanding of your identity is wrong.

Now, I don't want that to sound offensive. The reason we're saying that is because the Bible tells us so many amazing things about what Jesus makes us that they're actually quite hard to believe. [4 : 22] And so I hope we'll see that as we go through this study together. So that's our two controversial claims. It's possible for your understanding of your own identity to be wrong. It's highly likely that your understanding of your own identity is wrong.

And the reason for that is seen in this diagram that we shared a couple of weeks ago. That's incredibly important. We're saying that our identity is made up is related to three key things, what God thinks, what we think, and what other people think of us.

And what we said is that it's absolutely crucial that our arrows go in the right direction. And the reason for that is because it's so easy for the arrows to go in the wrong direction.

It's so easy for what we think to be the dominant factor, and that then shapes what we think of God and of others. Or it's incredibly easy for what other people think to be the dominant factor, shaping our identity and shaping our understanding of God.

And both of these things can lead to errors. It can happen in so many ways. So if you think back to school and you think back to maybe a teacher who was awful and a teacher who maybe loved to embarrass you in front of the rest of the class, which is everyone's worst nightmare.

[5 : 41] You're in class, you do something wrong, and you're the teacher embarrasses you. I remember a teacher used to love telling the whole class that your fly was open or something like that. And it would embarrass you in front of the whole class.

And so you have that negative experience of a teacher who would maybe embarrass you in front of the class. And then you read in the Bible about Jesus as our teacher, and you can project that negative idea of a teacher from the bad experience you had onto your understanding of God.

So you think of a teacher embarrassing you, making you feel like an embarrassment, making you feel worthless. That can shape what you think of yourself, and it can shape what you think of God.

And that's just one of a thousand ways that it can happen. The crucial thing in terms of understanding our identity is that this, what God thinks, has to shape everything else.

And so we'll keep coming back to that again and again and again. We've got to have the arrows pointing the right way. And so with that three part diagram in mind, it prompts three questions that are going to be the basis of our sermon today and next week.

[6 : 56] What does God think in terms of you as a child? What should you think? And what do we want others to think?

And as we'll see as we go through this, the word does, the word should, and the word want are all incredibly important. We were going to do all three today. We're never going to have time.

So we're just going to look at this question together and then we'll do the other two next week. So what does God think of you?

Well, the opening words of 1 John chapter three give an incredible answer to that question.

And these are among the most astounding and precious words that we find in the whole Bible. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are.

[8 : 01] And I love that verse, not just in terms of what it says, but in terms of how it is saying it, because when you look at that verse, that first sentence, it's really trying to press home the truth to all of you.

It starts with that word see, that command, see, think, recognize, understand what is being said here.

And then I love the fact that it's then reinforced at the end of the verse with these words here. And so we are because you've got such a beautiful emphasis here in terms of not just what God is saying, but the fact that he really wants us to understand that.

And that's incredible. It shows us so much, shows us something amazing about how effective and beautiful and powerful God's word is. As we read that sentence, that describes you and me as God's children, and it describes every person who trusts in Jesus as God's child.

As you read that statement, it is so, so easy to load that semicolon with doubts. And so you read that sentence and you think, oh, see what kind of love the Father's given to us, that we should be called children of God.

[9 : 18] And then that semicolon, you're like, yeah, but I'm different. And I don't really fit in. And I've made too many mistakes and I don't know enough.

And I'm really, really not convinced that that's what God would think of me. It's so easy for that semicolon to be a doorway to a whole ton of niggles and doubts.

But God immediately picks them all right out of the way with these words. He says, no, and so we are. So you really are.

That truth has just been pressed right home to all of us. And all of it is telling us that if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, then you are a Christian.

You are in God's family. And when he looks at you, he says, my child.

[10:24] God looks at you and says, my child. And the rest of the New Testament teaches us that all of that is grounded on the beautiful doctrine of adoption, which appears many, many times in the New Testament, emphasizing the fact that we are adopted into God's family when we put our trust in Jesus.

To become a Christian is to become somebody who is adopted into God's family. And that brings so many blessings and so many privileges, the fact that we are now God's children.

And an amazing summary of that is found here in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 12. Now, when I say Westminster Confession of Faith, you usually think, oh man, that sounds old and scary and impossible to understand.

It really, really isn't. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a document that was written about 400 years ago. It's just a summary of what the Bible teaches about key truths of the Christian faith. And chapter 12, that's the whole chapter, it's just one paragraph. It's all about adoption. And I'm just going to read it because it summarizes so beautifully everything that this means.

[11:39] All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, that means God grants, God gives, God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son, Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption.

That's just an old-fashioned way of saying that God is adopting you. Because of that, by which you're taken into the number, you enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God.

You have his name put on you. You receive the spirit of adoption, having access to the throne of grace with boldness, and able to cry, Abba, Father, Abba is just the Hebrew and Aramaic version way of saying, Daddy, Abba, Father, you are pitied, protected, provided for and chastened by him as a father yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.

It's such, it's a tiny paragraph, but there's so much in that. God is making you his children. And what this verse here is telling us is that at the heart of that relationship, at the heart of that change whereby we're adopted into that family, at the heart of that is the perfect love of the God who is the perfect Father.

When we're thinking about what kind of love the Father has for us, we're talking about a perfect Father's love. Now, there's so much that we could say about that, and we're only going to stretch the surface.

[13:30] I want to just say four things that I hope will be easy to remember because they begin A, B, C and D. So, when we think about the Father's love for you, the first thing I want to highlight is that that love is full of affection.

A is for affection. In other words, this is not a cold or rigid or mechanical love.

It's not a love that's unexpressed. Instead, it's a love that's full of affection. And really, that's what love is by its nature. Love is full of affection.

There's that deep sense of warmth and care and tenderness. And the key point that we're being highlighted here is that this is what God the Father wants to show you.

This is what he wants you to know. He wants to pour that love and affection into you. And I think that this is incredibly important for everyone, but it's especially important for us in our island culture because we are probably pretty good at unaffectionate love.

[14:50] And so, we can have situations, particularly in our families, where we love each other, but we maybe don't show that as openly or as expressively as other cultures would.

And maybe that's especially true of Father's. Now, that's not to say that there aren't Father's who are so expressive in their affection.

There are many, I know that, but there are also some who aren't. And some Father's who maybe do love their children deeply, who would do anything for them and who would pour their whole lives into caring for their families, but they don't say it.

And there's always maybe that wee bit of distance whereby, yes, there's a deep love in there, but it's not shown or it's shown in a very limited way.

And maybe you have experienced that, and maybe sometimes, you know, maybe you've known that you were loved by your father or your mother, but maybe there was that lack of affection that you often craved.

[16:11] God wants to show you his loving affection. He wants to pour reassurance and encouragement into you.

He wants to fill you with that knowledge of how much he loves you. And you think to yourself, well, how does he do that? How does God do that? The answer is, He just has.

So the whole reason why those words are written, so that you and I can see and know and understand how much God the Father loves you. These words are doing exactly what we've just described.

God is telling you straight, I love you. He's full of affection for you. B stands for belonging.

God's love means that you belong in his family. You belong with him. And this is so incredibly crucial for anybody here who has ever felt like an outsider.

[17:21] And I'm pretty sure we've all known how that feels at times. Maybe you can think of times in school among friends where you've got a group and you're just on the fringes.

You feel like you're just maybe left out. I remember how that felt in school. Maybe among colleagues, you see people that seem to get on great and you're just, there's never quite the same with you or it certainly feels like that.

Maybe even in your family, you feel like an outsider. Maybe even in church, you've been made to feel like an outsider.

For anyone who feels like that, God is telling you today, you are my child. You belong with me.

That's why Jesus is so full of that great instruction to people to say, come, come to me because you belong with me.

[18:31] That's why John can give this beautiful command in verse 28 that we are to abide in him because we belong with him. That's why Jesus spoke of going to prepare a place for us in John 14. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me.

In my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come again. I'll take you to myself that where I am, you may be also.

All of that is because you belong with your father. You belong with God. Heaven is like a giant football stadium.

But in that football stadium, the crowd doesn't cheer when a goal gets scored. The crowd cheer when a seat gets filled.

And that rejoicing in heaven over you is because that's where you belong. If you are testing in Jesus, if you've been following Jesus already, or if you're just starting to follow him, or if you're just seeking him and start following him from today onwards, you will never ever be an outsider.

[19:58] You're never ever unwelcome. You're never an intruder. You are a child and you belong with God, your father.

And I'm going to say something that is incredibly important. That is true even when you stuff things up.

Even when you make a massive mistake. A massive mistake as a new Christian, a massive mistake as somebody who's been a Christian for years, you still belong with your father.

And his commitment to you, his love for you, does not change. And yes, there will be many big nail varnish stains in our walk as Christians.

None of them will ever mean that you don't belong. C is for commitment. And I cannot even begin to describe how big that commitment is.

[21:18] How big God the Father's commitment to you is. John's letter, first letter, explains a little bit more about what that commitment involved. And if you go into chapter four in verses nine to 10, in this, the love of God was made manifest among us.

That God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

These verses are speaking about the fact that God's commitment to you is so great that he was willing to send his only son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross, to take the punishment for sin that

turns away the wrath of God.

That's what that word there, propitiation is referring to. God's wrath being turned away because Jesus died in their place and took the punishment for our sins in order that we might live through him.

And God's commitment to you is that big. God's commitment to you is rooted in the Trinity. It's demonstrated in utter agony.

[22 : 40] It's guaranteed for all eternity. It's rooted in the Trinity in that God the Father sent God the Son to die on the cross to save us.

And the reality of that sacrifice and everything that that accomplished is applied to us through the work of the Holy Spirit.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, who forever have existed in this beautiful relationship of love, have desired and determined to extend that love to you so that you would belong with God.

It's rooted in the Trinity. It's demonstrated in utter agony. When you see that word sent, it's not like just sent to the shop to do a wee message. It's sent to the cross and Jesus enduring all the pain and agony that that cross would bring.

And God's commitment to you is guaranteed for all eternity. There's no entropy in God's commitment to you.

[23 : 53] Entropy is what we mean when we describe the fact that everything in the universe around us is running down. Bit by bit, energy is slowly just fading away.

That never ever happens with God. His commitment to you is as strong today as it has ever been. Drop of commitment evaporates from God. His love for you, his commitment to you is guaranteed for all eternity.

So we've got A, affection, B, belonging, C commitment, D is the hardest one of all to believe.

D is for delight. God's love for you as his child is filled with delight.

[25 : 00] Now, I think all of us can find ourselves changing the D word to disappoint it.

Because if you're anything like me, you will so easily feel like you're a letdown and a disappointment to God. But it's not true. It's never true. God delights over you.

In fact, he sings over you as the beautiful words of Zephaniah 3.17 says, The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love.

He will exult over you with loud singing. That doesn't mean that God is delighted with everything that we do. In fact, it confirms why this is the opposite.

If any of my children or any of your children, those of you who are parents, go down an unwise path. That grieves you. But the reason it grieves you is not because they're no longer a delight.

[26 : 01] It's because they are your delight. And you never want them to go down a path that will hurt them. And if we can get that right as parents, how much more can God?

And so the ABC of God's love is absolutely magnificent. A is for affection. B is for belonging. C is for commitment. And D is for absolute delight.

And the reason we need these ABCDs is because we all doubt at least one of them.

And maybe you do doubt all of them. You struggle to imagine God wanting to show you affection that's warm and tender.

[27 : 06] You struggle to feel like you belong with Him or in church. You feel like God's commitment to you will fade.

And that when He really gets to know you, He'll walk away. And you think that there's absolutely no way that God could delight in you.

It's so, so easy to doubt all of these things. But this is why I remember I said, our question is this, what does God think?

And that word does is so important. Because this is what He actually does think about you.

And I can prove it to you. And I can prove it to you with grammar. Because in that phrase, see what kind of love the Father has given to us.

[28 : 19] That word given right there is in what's called the Greek perfect tense. Now the perfect tense in Greek is used to convey something that happens in the past and that continues on into the future in terms of its implications.

So it's not just an event that happens in the past, it's not past tense, it's perfect tense. So it's something that has happened and the implications of it continue on and on and on and on and on. And that's the tense that is used to describe that word given. The Father has given that love to you and it is never, ever, ever going to get taken back.

That's what the Father does think. And so all of it is pointing to the fact that for all of you here who are trusting in Jesus, for those of you who are about to start trusting in Jesus, who are seeking Him, this is everything that He wants to give you.

And He looks at you and He says, my child. And I want to just conclude with three things just to leave you to think about very briefly.

[29 : 52] I'm only preaching half my sermon today and I've still run out of time. It's not fair, but I'm nearly there. Three things I want you to think about as we conclude.

As I said, we'll look at this more next week, we'll answer our other two questions. I want to just press home three things to you and I want you to go away and think about them. The first is this, we're talking about fatherhood.

Fatherhood is imposed. Now in life that's often a problem. We have no choice who our father is and for some people the fatherhood that's imposed on them is actually a source of great sorrow and great difficulty and that's an incredibly hard thing.

Fatherhood is imposed, you've got no choice about that. And often in life that's a problem. With God it is utterly amazing.

He has made you His child and that is imposed on you in the best ever sense of that word imposed. He's made you His child, he's never ever going to undo that.

[31 : 08] And really that's just another word for grace. The fact that God comes and takes you and adopts you and says you're mine and I love you forever.

Fatherhood is imposed. Second thing is that God's fatherhood, well fatherhood in general is irrevocable.

And again in life that's a problem for many people. You know the fact that someone's a father and the fact that that's a difficult relationship, it's unreversible.

And again for some people that can be very very difficult. With God it is utterly amazing. He's made you His child, he's never going to undo that.

His affection, his commitment, his delight, the fact that you belong, it's irrevocable. Never changing.

[32 : 16] And thirdly, fatherhood is available. God has opened the door for us all to become His children.

And in order for that door to open, He gave His Son to die for us. And that door is open for all of you today.

And maybe you came in here today thinking I'm not sure. I'm not sure where I stand before God.

Well if you're not sure today, if you're someone who's just not sure, I want you to remember this. I knew that I was Tom and John and Annie's father long before they knew who I was.

[33 : 18] Long before they even understood what it meant to have a father. I knew long before them that they were mine.

And I'm pretty sure there's some people in here today who don't need to become God's children.

You need to realise that you are God's children. And if that's you, if you're not sure, then just pray to God, ask Him to guide you and help you.

You can do it right now, you can do it in our final singing. And as you do that, it will mean that maybe you came in here saying I'm not sure.

You can go out of here saying I'm God's child. Amen.