

Life As Gods Children

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[0:00] Well, this morning I'd like us to turn back together to the passage we read. And let me read again from 1 John 3 and verse 2.

! In many ways, though, I want us to focus on this word, the word now, and to think about the emphasis that this verse is giving us in terms of what we are now in our lives.

And as we think about that, the pathway of life that we go through, if we think about where we are now in our lives, whatever stage you're at, whatever you're going through, whatever life looks like for you, very often in our lives, there are two issues that can plague us and can be a shadow that loom over us at whatever stage we're at.

One of them is the question or the issue of what I am really like. And that can plague us in lots of ways because often I think we can feel that we can do our best to put on a good impression and we can do our best to kind of soldier on through life, make sure that we are keeping going and coping and managing and doing things as well as we can. And yet often there's this fear that if people knew what we were really like, then it would be so different. Often in our hearts, we can feel a sense of shame because of the things that we've done where we've messed up in our lives. And often we can also feel a real sense of insecurity in terms of, you know, sometimes we're alongside other people and we think, you know, we could be in a room, maybe it's at work, there's a discussion, you think, oh man, I'm the stupidest person in this room because everybody else seems so capable. Or we might be doing something in our lives and everybody else seems to be coping fine and we're struggling. And often we feel that sense of insecurity. That whole question of what I'm really like can plague us. And even John touches on that in verse 20, where he speaks about our hearts condemning us. That's often how it feels, isn't it? Sometimes there's the voice inside us that's just condemning us and being cruel and bringing us down. So that's one of the issues that can plague us a lot. The other issue that can be a big shadow over our lives is what other people think of us. And so that's a big issue and a big fear as well. What do other people think of me? And that applies at school, it can apply amongst friend groups, it can apply in the workplace, it can apply in family, and really it applies everywhere. There's that pressure and that anxiety. What do other people think of me?

[3:13] And all of us want other people to think well of us. And yet sometimes there's a fear of like, well, what do they really think? And sometimes you might be with somebody and one day they seem great and you think, okay, excellent. They're my friend and all this is fine. And then you might meet them again and they're maybe not as warm, not as kind. You think, oh, what do they think of me now? And there's this huge pressure and anxiety about what other people think. So these two things can plague lots of people. Well, certainly they plague me. They've plagued me in my life, this whole question of what I'm really like and what other people think.

Now, those two issues are really what we could describe as issues of nature and status. So nature is what I'm really like. That's what you actually find if you could unpeel my heart and see into my thoughts, see the kind of person I am. That's my nature. And status is what other people think of me. Status is conferred in us from outside and that's how we're regarded, whether it's positively or negatively. And when we struggle, we try to conceal this one and we try to control this one. So when my heart's condemning me and when I see all sorts of insecurities, weaknesses, mistakes, regrets and scars in my nature, I want to conceal that because I feel embarrassed and ashamed and insecure. And in terms of what other people think of us, we want to control that, don't we? We want to give the best possible impression and we do that in terms of how we look, we do that in terms of what we achieve, how we speak, even the possessions that we have, our accomplishments at work or in school. We are trying to control what other people think of us. And so in terms of our nature, we feel that there's so much we want to hide, we try to conceal it.

In terms of our status, there's so much that we want to try and improve, so we want to control it. And so we're concealing our nature, controlling our status, and the whole thing is exhausting. And so many people are being crushed by these two things from either side. What I'm really like, what others are saying about me, we want to conceal, we want to control. What I want to recognize today is that the gospel deals with both of these in a completely different way. The gospel addresses the whole issue of nature and the whole issue of status with the same concept.

It does so by emphasizing the fact that if we put our faith in Jesus, we become a child of God. God. We are God's children now. And that's a big emphasis in 1 John, a big emphasis in all of John's writings, big emphasis in the whole of the New Testament. You go to the first chapter of John's gospel. He has this wonderful verse where he speaks about those who received Jesus, who believed in his name. He gave the right to become children of God. And so I want us to think a little bit about this today, and I want to think about how it helps us in terms of our nature, in terms of our status.

And I want to tie it to two big doctrines that the New Testament reveals. Now there's a bit of overlap in what I'm going to say here, so what I'm putting before you just now is always a bit of a simplification. All the diagrams I draw are simplifications, but I hope that they're helpful. When we think about our nature as a child of God, what the Bible is primarily referring to there is what we call regeneration, which is also the language that Jesus uses of being born again. And in terms of status, the main emphasis there is the doctrine of adoption, which you find very much in Paul.

[7:16] So Paul talks about adoption a lot. He says in Galatians 4, for example, when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you're sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So Paul, generally Paul leans towards the adoption side and emphasizing that reality. John, on the other hand, emphasizes more this whole doctrine of regeneration, this whole idea of being born again. So if I go back to John chapter 1, the gospel, I read the verse that says, to all who did receive him, who received Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And what I want to emphasize here, what I'm trying to bring before you, is that this is not a very technical sentence that I'm going to give you right now, but basically there is just a doubly brilliant emphasis in the New Testament in terms of how much you are

God's child. A doubly brilliant emphasis that in terms of our nature and in terms of our status, if you put your trust in Jesus, if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, you become God's child, born of God, adopted by God. And I want to say a little bit about both of these, but I'm going to focus mostly on the regeneration side of it because that's what John emphasizes mostly in this letter. So let's just think a little bit about that together. So we're thinking about this idea of being born. So we'll talk about birth. And immediately when you think of birth, you think about life. So birth brings life. So that's two, whenever anything's born, a lamb, a calf, a child, always new. So when something's born, new life exists. New life comes through birth.

So this language of being born of God, this language of birth, is the language of new life. And that's what we mean when we talk about regeneration, being born again, new life. It's this transformation that takes place where we go from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive. And it's so important to remember that that's the effect that sin has had on us. It's not left us spiritually weak. It's not left us spiritually confused. It's actually left us spiritually dead. There's no life in us.

And so for there to be life in us, that has to come through birth. We have to have a spiritual rebirth. We need to be born again. So birth leads to life. Life comes from birth. But at the same time, we have to recognize that birth comes from life. So our life comes from our birth. But the whole reason that we could be born was because of the life of our parents. And so you have this kind of this chain, if you like. We can only be born because the life in our parents is implanted to us. A dead person cannot conceive. Birth can only come from life. So my natural birth, your natural birth comes from the life that's in your parents. Same for them and their parents, and so on, and so on, and so on.

And so birth is, if you like, the transfer of life to another. Life, birth, life is the pattern that we're following. And I want us to recognize this because this is exactly how the gospel works.

[11:12] This is exactly what happens to us as Christians. We are born again because life is transferred, imparted, implanted, however you want to describe it. Life is given to us.

And that life is the life of the risen Lord Jesus. And so the Bible will use this language again and again and again, that we are alive in Jesus. So Romans, Paul speaks about that. Christ being raised from the dead, we know we'll never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. So you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Colossians 3 says the same thing. You've died, your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also, you also will appear with him in glory. So our life, our new life comes from the life imparted to us by Jesus. And this is the crucial difference between the illustration that I used of family generation. So when I spoke about our life coming from our parents, our physical life, we're talking about a long chain. And so me, my parents, their parents, their parents, their parents, it's a chain that goes all the way back. But our spiritual new birth, the life from that comes from Jesus. And so that life that comes from Jesus is a life that is not dependent on another. It's not part of a chain. But it's a limitless source of resurrection life in and through Jesus as he's risen and ascended at the right hand. And we have new life. And we have new life because in the gospel, we are united to him. We're united to Jesus.

And his life gives us life. But there's more than that. Because birth is not just the transfer of life. Because when we are born, we don't just become a continuation of our biology. All the little feet in creche just now are not just continuations of your DNA. They're your children. They are your children.

[13:43] And that has a whole new level of connection and relationship. And so when God makes us alive through rebirth, we don't simply become spiritually alive beings like, for example, angels. We become more than that. We become God's children. And it's so important to think about that because this is this is emphasizing, this is helping us to see and recognize what God thinks of us. We've got lots and lots of big theological terms that we use. And this is where it's important to emphasize the kind of the real high point of what John is teaching here. We've got lots of big terms. We've got terms like justified and sanctified and redeemed and all that kind of stuff. But when God looks at you, he doesn't say, my justified. He doesn't say, my sanctified. He doesn't say, my redeemed one. He says, my child.

My precious, beloved child. And that places God's love for you at the highest level. It's the love of a beloved, of a loving father to their precious, precious child. Now, in saying all this, I'm always conscious and every preacher is so conscious that not everybody's experience of their own parents, and maybe especially of their own father, has been positive. Not all of it's been a reflection of what God intended it to be. But the gospel again and again and again wants to take us back to this truth, whether it's something that we've actually experienced a glimpse of in a good, loving father that many of us have had, or maybe something that has been denied us because we've not experienced that in our parents. Either way, God is wanting, the Bible is wanting to take us back to this truth because it's getting to the heart of how God sees us and God views us. And so when you imagine the best example of parenting, the best example of a father, why does that father love his baby? There's only one reason. You love them because they're yours.

And they're yours in a way that nothing else is. And that's the love that God has towards his people. It's emphasized by the phrase that John uses at the very start of the chapter. He says, see what kind of love the father has given to us.

That's a really interesting phrase that gets used there because literally the phrase, what kind of, comes from a Greek word which basically means from what country. And it's a bit like saying, where in the world have you ever found love like this? It's a phrase that's just expressing astonishment. And John's saying, look, do you realize how incredible God's love for you is? God looks at you and says, you're mine. Not simply that you belong to me, but that you are born of me. So we've got this transformation in our nature, making us children of God.

[17:33] And then all of this is confirmed by what the Bible says in regard to our status, which moves us more towards the teaching in the Bible about adoption.

Adoption. Adoption is such an amazing concept to think through in the New Testament because it's just full of, it's all the language, it's all legal language. It's all highly official.

And so there's this external legal declaration that we are God's children. And behind that lies an amazing transformation in our status where we go from being God's enemies to being part of his family.

And crucially, it involves an irrevocable commitment on the part of God. That when our status becomes that of God's children, God has done something that he is never going to undo. And so these two things together are so magnificent. Regeneration means that in you, in your heart, something has changed. And that change is irrevocable. And outside of you, there is this authoritative declaration from God that you are his child and he is not going to go back on that. And all of this, all of this has to make a massive difference to our lives now. And it has to make a massive difference to these two issues that are constantly plaguing us. What you really are. [19:10] And I think of myself when I think, what am I really, what I really am. So often we find that we think what I really am is like nowhere near what I wish I was. What I really am is nowhere near as smart as I want to be. Nowhere near as successful. Nowhere near as confident. Nowhere near as capable. Far more mistakes and people realize far more struggles, far more weaknesses, far more things that I wish weren't there. And you think, what I really am is so depressing.

And if we think like that, we're misunderstanding the gospel. Because if you are a Christian, if you become a Christian, what you really are is God's child. That's what you really are. And everything else, the regrets, the mistakes, the struggles, the bruises, the weaknesses, the huge mistakes that we make, all of these, yes, they're there, but they cannot change what you really are. And instead, they are things that God will help us work through and work past and overcome. And so the gospel's answer to the what you really are is just amazing. But also, the status plague what others think of you. Well, what others think of you, the gospel can't control what the people at work or at school or at uni or in your community think of you. That's part of living in a broken world. But what the gospel does teach you and what the gospel does confirm is what God thinks about you. And he looks upon you and he sees you as his child. And as we think about that, I just want to introduce you to a concept that I think is helpful to think about in terms of how our lives are shaped. So I want to introduce a concept called leading opinions, ruling decisions. Leading opinions, ruling decisions. What do I mean by that? What I mean by that is that what other people think about us shapes the decisions that we make. And that can happen in loads of ways. So what other people think of us shapes the decisions that we make in our lives. And what I want to emphasize here is that among all of that, I mean there's lots of ways in which that's minor and doesn't matter too much, but among that there are some leading opinions in other people that rule our decisions.

[22:03] And so they're the people whose opinion matters so much to us. And sometimes that can be in a really positive way where we think, you know, I want my decisions to be wise and careful and loving towards my family. But sometimes this can affect us in a really, really negative way where we feel hugely pressured by the people around us, by their expectations, by what they want. And often we find ourselves conforming to the external pressure of these opinions. And these things have a huge influence over the decisions that we make in our lives. And sometimes we end up making decisions that we regret, but we just do it because we want to conform to these leading opinions. What I want us to recognize is that if this is true of us, which I think it is, that are leading opinions, ruling our decisions, what I want us to recognize is that whoever it is that is doing that in your life, whoever it is that's doing that in your life is your Lord. Whoever's doing that in your life is your Lord.

Because you've made them your master. And you know that there is only one person who should be Lord of our lives.

And that's God. But the incredible thing that this verse and all this doctrine is teaching us is that what does that leading opinion think of you?

What does that, what does the one who has ultimate opinion, what does the Lord himself think of you? He looks at you and he sees his child. And this is where it's so, so important that we never ever question or doubt God's absolute devotion, commitment and care towards you.

And this is where it's so important to have the right understanding of God. So often, so often we impose onto God our bad experiences, whether it's a bad experience of a boss, bad experience in family, bad experience in school or whatever it might be.

[24:29] We impose that bad experience onto our conception of God. We must never, ever, ever do that. Instead, we need the truth that scripture reveals to be pressed into our hearts.

Sometimes we're suspicious of God.

He's always a loving, loyal, devoted, good father. Now, as such, as a good father, he teaches us, disciplines us, corrects us, guides us.

All of that confirms his love rather than undermines it. And it all emphasizes the fact that we want his commitment to us, his love towards us, his view of us to shape all the decisions that we make. And this takes us back to where we started, that word, now. 1 John 3.2 is an amazing verse because there's a wonderful eschatological kind of glimpse for us.

[26:03] It's looking to the future. What we will be has not yet appeared. We know that we'll be like Jesus. We'll see him as he is. There's so much amazing theology there. But I want us to focus on that word.

The fact that we are God's children now. And so in terms of our nature, we are God's children now. In terms of our status, we are God's children now. And that has to have a massive effect on how we live our lives this week.

And we have to be ready to say, I am God's child, so I'm not doing that.

So we're going to step into this week. You're going to be surrounded by people. They'll be saying all sorts of things they shouldn't be saying. They'll have all sorts of attitudes they shouldn't have.

[27:05] You'll see gossip. You'll see cruel jokes. You'll see deceit. You'll see people maybe just manipulating their positions of authority in order to succeed.

You'll see God's word being taken in vain. You'll feel pressure to compromise. You will often feel like you're swimming against the tide. And you'll face a whole ton of temptation to follow what everybody else is doing.

And I want us all to press these words into our hearts. I am God's child, so I'm not doing that. And later on in chapter 3, it speaks about that that might mean that people don't like us.

Don't be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. That might happen. That might happen.

That's a big might happen for anyone who's a Christian.

People around you might dislike you for it. You might be rejected. So that's a difficult maybe for the Christian life that sometimes people might hate us.

[28:16] And that's really, really tough. But alongside that difficult maybe that we can face as we follow Jesus, there is an irrevocable certainty.

That God has made you his child. That he's caused you to be born again, given you a new nature. And he's adopted you into his family.

And he's never changing his mind. It's an irrevocable certainty. And the bigger that irrevocable certainty can be in your mind, the smaller and smaller the difficult maybe of people not liking us becomes.

Last thing I want to say is, again, just from that word, now. It's just a great reminder that that's the thing that God is most interested in at this moment in time.

What we all are now. And I hope that for all of us, whether it's just for those of us who continue on to follow Jesus, we're thinking, that is what I am and that is how I live.

[29:38] But for anyone who is not yet a Christian or not sure or thinking about all of this, if you want to talk more about it or ask questions, please, please do that. But I want you to know that God wants to make you his child now.

God wants to make that now your now. And all he asks us to do is to put our faith in Jesus.

To ask him to save us. And to follow him. And you can wake up every morning and repeat that amazing phrase to yourself for the rest of your life.

We are God's children now. Amen.