

# I John - We Shall Be Like Him

by Mariano Di Gangi

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*The sermon emphasizes the dignity and privilege of being called children of God, the destiny of becoming like Jesus Christ, and the duty of purifying ourselves through the means provided by God.*

**Duration:** 26:29

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 1:10, Philippians 2:12, 1 John 3:1-3, 1 John 3:10

**Topics:** "Sanctification"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the hope and anticipation of the future destiny that awaits believers. He shares a personal anecdote about being commissioned to paint a mural in a church and the challenges he faced during the process. The speaker then highlights three things that believers know about their future: that Jesus will appear, that there are things about their destiny that are yet to be revealed, and that God always keeps His promises. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the responsibility believers have to purify themselves in preparation for their eventual encounter with Jesus.

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## Transcript

The first letter of John, the third chapter, beginning at verse one. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are.

The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are the children of God. And what we will be has not yet been made known, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. There's a recurring commercial that comes across and sticks in the mind. At speedies, you're a somebody.

The whole matter of self-esteem, the whole matter of recognition, the whole matter of personal worth looms very large for you and me. And the Apostle John says that our quest for self-esteem is at an end when you and I can say that we are children of God. That's the most precious identity that any one of us could ever have.

It's the highest dignity that could ever belong to you and me, that we, of all people, should be called children of God. And notice the exclamation with which the passage begins. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God.

The phrase translated, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us, is a rather strange expression. It means from what kind of country does this love come? In other words, where in the world does this kind of love originate? It originates out of this world. It originates in heaven, in the heart of God.

It is an incomparable love. How great, how extraordinary, how incomparable, how unparalleled is the love that the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. That you and I should be called creatures in view of the fact that he is creator, that's understandable.

That you and I should be called subjects in view of the fact that he is king, that too is comprehensible. That we should be called sheep because he is a shepherd, that follows. To be called students because he is the incomparable teacher, that too is explainable.

But that he, God Almighty, should become our father and call us his children, that is altogether incomparable, unparalleled. It is stupefying. And so he begins with that exclamation, how great is the love that the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.

That we, you and I, should be called children of God. Think of what this meant for the original apostles. This was written by John, who with his brother James was notorious for being hot-tempered, ill-tempered, vindictive, before the grace of God began to change his character and that of his brother.

Imagine John saying that James and I, fishermen, hot-tempered, sons of thunder, always rumbling about something, wanting fire and brimstone to come down from heaven and consume to a crisp those who differed from us, that we should be called children of God. Or listen to Thomas, that I, a doubter, a born pessimist, if others would find a silver lining, I would spend all my time looking for the dark cloud, that a person like me, totally lacking in optimism, should be called God's child. What a privilege.

Or think of Matthew, a traitor to his own people, the Jews, working for the Roman armies of occupation, collecting and exacting taxes and more than people should have paid, getting rich at their expense. Remembering his sordid past, how great is the love of the Father toward us, that people like me should be called children of God. And so it goes, and each of us can fill in the situation for ourselves, that we being frail creatures of dust, that we being fallible men and women, that we being faulty in our character and flawed in our nature, what love is this, that you and I should be called children of God.

And says the apostle, we're not only called children of God, but that is what we are. It's not merely a matter of label, it's a matter of essence. It's not merely a matter of being called God's children, but of actually being God's children.

And that defies imagination. How do we become God's children? Scripture refers to it in two ways, and we need not elaborate on them, but we need to mention them. The first figure of speech that is used in scripture is that of adoption, adoption, where someone adopts a child and makes that child part of the family, having the same access to the parents and sharing in the inheritance of the others.

God has adopted us into his family by an act of sheer unmerited grace. And the other figure of speech that is used in scripture is that of regeneration, rebirth, the sort of thing that Jesus discussed in a midnight dialogue with a leader of the Jews named Nicodemus. Nicodemus, you can't enter the kingdom of God.

You can't understand what the kingdom of God is about. You cannot belong to the family of God unless you are born from above, unless you are reborn by the Spirit, unless you become a new person. And so whether it's by the act of adoption or the act of regeneration, we are entering into the family of God not

because of any worth on our part, but because of an unparalleled and incomparable love on his part.

And, says the apostle, before we get overjoyous about this tremendous dignity that God has conferred on us, regardless of the size or slenderness of our bank account, regardless of the language that we speak, regardless of the cultural group from which we come, regardless of the race that is seen in the color of our skin, that God should call us his children. Remember that you live in a world that is indifferent, a world that is hostile, a world that doesn't understand what it means to be a child of God, a world that doesn't appreciate God's adopting and regenerating love, a world that doesn't understand the principles that belong to the family of God, a world that does not comprehend the motivations that should beat in the breast of every son and daughter of the Almighty, a world that has no appreciation of the goal toward which your life now is oriented. Don't worry about that, says the apostle.

If the world doesn't recognize you as a child of God and doesn't understand your relationship to the Heavenly Father, that should come as no surprise because it didn't know, it didn't recognize, and it didn't appreciate Jesus when he came either. Our dignity, that you and I should be called and actually become children of God. That would be wonderful enough, but you know, the apostle doesn't stop there.

He moves on from the description of our dignity as God's children to speak of our destiny, and he says, Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Many years ago, more than I care to remember by reckoning, I used to earn pin money by singing at weddings on Saturdays and doing the occasional bit of mural painting on the side. A group of churches near the Quebec, New York border heard about my fame and invited me to submit a design to be painted in their chancel.

You know, the traditional sort of Presbyterian thing with a burning bush and things of that sort. And so on a very hot day in summer, they arranged for a ladder with thinnest of rungs to be put up against the wall of the chancel. They gave me the scope of paints that I needed, and I got started.

You lost all feeling from your knees down to your ankles standing on the rung of that ladder. You sweltered because your head was up against the tin ceiling of the church building. You tried to do your best, and you could hear the farmers coming in and taking a look.

And you could hear their comments. Now I feel sorry for Michelangelo and what Pope Julius II might have been saying while the sealing of the Sistine Chapel was being done. And I could hear one farmer say to another with his tractor still running outside, what's he doing up there? Make any sense to you? Don't make any sense to me.

Why did we have to change things anyway? I wonder what he's got in mind. You see, the trouble was that they looked at what I was doing in the towns of Atholston and Elgin before the job was complete. There was simply the outline and splotches of paint.

I knew what would be going into those areas. I knew what refinements would be superimposed on each of the blocks of color, but they didn't. And so it is in the matter of being children of God.

He knows what the end is from the beginning. He's got a design in mind. He knows what he wants to produce.

But so far, all we see is the broad outline and the splotches of color without the refinements that are yet to come. And isn't that the greatest of reasons for you and I to be patient with one another in our families and

in our church and on our session and in our board of managers and our trustees and our choir and our Sunday school staff? God has started a good work in us, but that good work has not yet been brought to completion. Now we are God's children.

It does not yet appear what we shall be, but God knows what we shall be. God knows the end from the beginning. He knows what is now a block of color will become a thing of beauty to be enjoyed forever.

And so we have to be patient with ourselves and patient with one another because God isn't finished with us yet. Now we are children of God. It does not yet appear what we shall be, and yet our destiny is not one that is in doubt.

For we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Remember that verse in 1 Corinthians 2? The eye of man has not seen, the ear of man has not heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him. A future, a destiny of beauty and of glory is ahead, imperfect as God's work in us now appears to be.

And we need to have hope. We need to look forward. We need to have our eyes riveted on what is yet to come because God has promised and God always keeps his word.

And so even though there are things about the future that we do not know, there are things that we do know about our destiny. Let me just mention three of them here in passing. First, we know that he shall appear.

We hold on to the promise of his coming, regardless of the apparent delay of the centuries, regardless of the mockers and the scoffers, we know that he will come because he has given us the promise of his coming. We're sure of that. He shall appear.

Second certainty, we shall see him. And that certainty goes away back to the days of the Old Testament when a man who went through terrible times of tragedy said, I know that my redeemer lives and that he shall stand again upon the earth at the latter day. And though worms destroy this body yet in my renewed flesh, I shall see God.

I shall not depend on secondhand knowledge, but I shall see him and know him for myself. That was the testimony of Job centuries before the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. So I know that he shall appear and I know that I shall see him in all his resplendent glory.

And the third thing that I know is that I shall be like him. At last, like him in his patience, like him in his compassion, like him in his passion for righteousness, like him in dealing with the weak, like him in having a right sense of priorities, like him having a heart totally devoted to the love of God. What will it be like to have a perfection of our spirit and a resurrection body beyond the reach of tiredness, beyond the reach of temptation, beyond the reach of trouble and sickness and death? I know that he shall come.

I know that I shall see him and I know that I shall be transformed into his likeness. That is a destiny worth cherishing. That's a hope worth having.

And it belongs to every single one of us if we are members of the family of God. You know, that is what God had in mind from the beginning. In Romans 8, 29, we are told that from before the foundation of the world, God set his love upon us, that in the course of time he called us with the gospel, that then he justified us forgiving our sins, and then he brought us to the state of glorification, which means conformity

to the likeness of his son.

It's not said that we will become equal to Jesus Christ, but that we will finally become like Jesus Christ. And it is Christ's likeness that is our goal, our destiny, as well as God's intention. Let me sum up everything that I've said in the use of just a few lines drawn from a man named Thomas Kelly.

He put it like this, Keep us, Lord, O keep us cleaving to thyself and still believing, till the hour of our receiving promise joys with thee. Then we shall be where we would be. Then we shall be what we should be.

Things that are not now nor could be soon shall be our own. Dignity, destiny, one thing more, duty. There's no such thing as a promise or a privilege in scripture without a precept or a responsibility being attached to it.

And what is the duty? It's a big one. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure. Our dignity demands it.

Our destiny demands it. If we are children of God and if we hope someday to become like Jesus Christ, then we've got to begin now and prepare for that eventual encounter with him by purifying ourselves in keeping with the pattern of perfection and purity that he himself is. We shall see him.

He shall come. Let's get ready for it. For either he will call us to appear before the throne of his majesty at the moment of our death, or if we are alive upon the earth, when he cleaves the clouds of heaven and comes to us, the encounter is inevitable.

And we must prepare for that encounter with Jesus by beginning now to purify ourselves as he is pure. That means for one thing that we should avoid being morally sloppy and careless. Pursue holiness as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, without which no man shall see the Lord.

But on the other hand, we ought to forego despondency and discouragement and depression, because God has provided the means by which you and I can begin to clean house and get ready to behold him when we meet him. What are the means that the Lord has provided so that we might purify ourselves? We all know them, but do we use them? One is found right here in my hands. It's called God's word.

Remember the prayer of Jesus? He prayed for his followers. Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word is truth.

It is through the reading of the word of God and examining our lives in the light of the word that we can become clean in his sight. Second, the sacraments. Let's never undervalue the sacraments in recoiling from the excesses of the Church of Rome.

Let us value the sacraments. Every time we see the sacrament of baptism administered, we should be reminded that as water cleanses the skin, so the grace of God cleanses the pollution of personality. And we ought to ask him to wash us and make us clean.

Every time we break bread together and celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we are to remember the great price that Jesus paid for our salvation. And the more we remember his costly sacrifice, the less we will be allured by the power of temptation to keep on doing the things that nail him afresh to that cross. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, says the word of God.

Why? Because Christian fellowship can be one of the best means of strengthening your spirituality and purifying yourself. The confession of sin. He has reminded us of this already in 1 John.

If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us and to purify us from all unrighteousness. By using the means which God has so generously provided, we can develop resistance against the power of sin and develop obedience to the will of God. In other words, what the apostle is telling us here is but the echo of that other familiar word which Paul penned to the Philippians.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, remembering that it is God who works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. With such a dignity as this, with such a destiny unfolding before us, God grant that we may set ourselves with holy and firm and high resolve to do our duty, purifying ourselves as he himself is pure, so that when we behold him in all his resplendent glory, we shall not fear and we shall not show shame but rejoice in the hope of glory. Let us pray.

Lord, you have spoken to our hearts through your word. Now enable us by the indwelling power of your spirit to apply that word to our hearts, to treasure it up within our minds, and to obey it in our daily living until we behold Jesus face to face. In his name we pray.

Amen.

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