

## **Theme: Not Just Sheep, Children!**

### **Text: 1 John 3:1-2 (NKJV)**

**Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.**

The words of our previous Scripture readings from **Psalm 23** and **John 10** are some of the most comforting and endearing pictures in the whole Bible: Jesus is our Good Shepherd and you and I are one of His sheep. The thought of Jesus guiding us, caring for us, protecting us—even giving up His life for us—as our loving shepherd throughout our life all the way to our heavenly home fills our hearts with peace.

However, even as we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, we are reminded that God’s love for us is not as one of His pets, or one of His livestock. No, our sermon text for today uses no picture language or symbolism. It tells us plainly what we are and who we are to Him: **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (v. 1).**

This is not just some honorary title either—He has literally *adopted* us into His family, making us His sons and daughters and brothers and sisters of His Son Jesus! We are not just *called* children of God, **v. 2** reminds us **“Beloved, now we are children of God”!**

How? If you read a few verses after our sermon text John reminds us, first of all, that it was through Jesus and the forgiveness He came to bring us when He came to this earth as one of us: **“He was manifested [“made known”] to take away our sins” (v. 5).** That forgiveness was made our own and our adoption papers were signed, sealed, and delivered to us personally, so to speak, when God’s Holy Spirit worked in our hearts the miracle of faith at our baptism. Paul writes in Galatians, **“For you are all sons [“heirs”] of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27).**

God has adopted us into His family through our Savior and Brother, Jesus Christ! Why don’t we always realize what an incredible gift this “adoption” into God’s family is for us? Well, part of the reason, John tells us, is that we can’t even fully conceptualize this blessing this side of heaven! He says, **Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (v. 2).**

Another reason might be because at times in this life, being a “child of God” may not seem like all that great a gift at all. Oftentimes it means that we will be called to suffer or give up our own desires and pleasures for the sake of God and His kingdom. We might be misunderstood, mistreated, and abused by this world, possibly even by our own earthly family because of our faith in Christ. At times in this life we may not feel like we’re special, or even that we’re loved completely as the “children of God.”

But, as John tells us, **“When He is revealed,”** that is, when Jesus comes again on the Last Day, we will know! He goes on to say, **“we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!” (v. 2).** What’s that going to be like to be like Jesus? To see Jesus as He really is? What’s it going to feel like to have our bodies perfectly glorified? What’s it going to be like living in perfect joy and peace without sin death and sorrow for all eternity? John tells us, we don’t really know yet, **“it has not yet been revealed what we shall be” (v. 2a).** Our ultimate glorification in heaven as God’s children is like the biggest, shiniest, most exciting present ever. It’s ours and it has been given *freely* to you and me. But it is still wrapped. God is waiting for the perfect time to give it to us. And so like children waiting for Christmas Day we wait with eager anticipation for the full revelation of this great gift of His heavenly kingdom that Jesus has bought and paid for for us!

A third reason we don't always realize what an incredible gift this adoption into God's family really is, is because we don't always understand or realize where it is we were and what our situation was before we were made "**children of God.**" There was nothing we did to deserve this adoption. There was nothing we could do to earn it either. At our birth into this life we were not in God's family. We were lost. We were spiritually dead in our sins and headed for eternal death. In fact the Bible tells us that by nature we were actually enemies of God (**Romans 8:7**)! We didn't love Him. By nature we didn't even want to be rescued! But He loved us! Despite our unlovable-ness and hostility towards Him, God came to us with His Son Jesus, saw us in the eternal cage of our sin, and had compassion on us. He reached into history—into our *personal* history—and adopted us into His family! He chose us, we did not choose Him! Listen again to the words from our text, "**Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!**" (v. 1).

I come from a large family on both my father's side and my mother's side. Last month, when I attended my grandma's victory service in Wisconsin I was reminded just how large my family is. During the reading of her obituary I was reminded that my grandma (this would be my father's mother) had 27 grandchildren and 72 great-grandchildren! There were over 100 of her family members gathered there at her victory service and we nearly filled the church by ourselves. The thought occurred to me as I watched all of my family members file out at the end of the service, "This is the smaller side of my family!" My mom's side of the family has quite a few more than this! What a blessing to have such a large family. What a blessing it was to reconnect with my siblings, my parents, and some of my cousins and aunts and uncles that I hadn't seen in years and see their children all growing up so quickly. That reunion of so many of our family members that day took some of the sadness and sting out of losing our grandmother and helped remind us just how blessed we all are to be a part of her family.

It is a tremendous blessing to be a part of a family. Our earthly family is a great blessing and a great gift from God. I hope and pray that we all treasure our families and tell them how much we love them and how much we appreciate them. Whether you come from a large family or a small one, our text reminds us today that we belong to and even greater family: God's family. Because of this we can look forward to the largest and happiest "family reunion" ever in heaven! That one will truly take the sadness and sting of death away because it will be in a place where there is no death, or sorrow, or pain, or sin—ever again!

While we wait for that blessed reunion, let's remember that because we are God's children through faith in Jesus that makes us all brothers and sisters in Christ. We are all members of one family: The spiritual, eternal family of God. Let's reflect that in the way we speak and act toward each other, and in the way we think about each other. Let's reflect that in the way we work together in our "family business:" The kingdom of God, His Church.

With Jesus, our Good Shepherd, lovingly guiding us, we will! But what a blessing that He is even more than our Good Shepherd: He is our Brother and our Savior! We are His dear sheep—His little lambs. But what a blessing that we are even more than that: We are His brothers and sisters; we are God's children. "**Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!**" (v. 1) Amen.