

My Song Is Love Unknown

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[0 : 00] You can take your Bibles this morning and open them to John's first letter.

! It's a letter that's written very personally, a very personable letter from the Apostle John, as well as, of course, pastoral.

John is writing as a pastor. He's an apostle. The apostles were the first pastors of the church, the forerunners of, well, me.

I'm not an apostle, okay? There aren't any more of those, all right, contrary to what a lot of people are trying to tell us today. But John was an apostle. John was a pastor.

He's writing very personally, lovingly, and pastorally. And John, at this time in his life, I think you could say that he was in the twilight years of his life.

[1 : 22] In fact, most likely somewhere in his 80s, which was a long time to live back in that day, actually. Not many lived to be as old as the Apostle John.

So he's an older fella. Very, very fatherly. I guess we could even say grandfatherly kind of personality, though also a pastor.

And I think that's why John repeatedly referred to his readers as little children. You find that, by the way, nine times in this letter, this first letter of his.

Little children. And perhaps to remind you that the aged apostle, when he wrote this letter, was living in Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor, modern Turkey today.

Ephesus still exists today, by the way. And so he's living there, and he's writing to church people just like us.

[2 : 24] I think primarily Gentiles. So to remind you a little bit about who's writing it and kind of the, oh, the emotion, the kind of desire on the heart of the aged apostle John.

So if you have your Bibles open there to 1 John, look at chapter 3, and I'm going to read verses 1 through 3. So we'll look at three verses tonight, I mean this morning. Not tonight, this morning.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God. And some of you have other translations, and you have this phrase, and so we are.

Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God. And it has not yet appeared, been revealed, rather, 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.

And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. Now, before we really get into the message, I want to give you kind of an introduction to the main part of my message this morning, kind of an introduction.

[4 : 05] And I want you to look back at the previous chapter, chapter 2, in the very last verse of chapter 2, where John says, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is, and this is what I want you to focus on, born of God.

Born of God. Now, we're pretty familiar with that phrase. I mean, it appears other places in the Bible, this idea of a new birth, being born of God. And, but I want you to think about that phrase.

Born of God. Because, you see, John's going to carry on into chapter 3 with that thought in his mind. And we're going to kind of launch out into chapter 3 with that thought in our mind as well.

This whole idea, this whole thought, this wonderful reality, spiritual reality for all believers, that we're born of him.

Born of God. And we looked at this passage last week, and I didn't point this out, but John is emphasizing, just in that phrase, he is emphasizing really the words in him, or of him.

[5 : 20] That's really the emphasis in the phrase. Of him. And I've said this before, but word order is very important in the Greek language. If they wanted to emphasize something particularly, they would put it on the front.

Now, it doesn't come out that way in the English, but in the Greek, here's how that portion of the verse would read, you know that everyone who practices righteousness, of him they are born. Of him. So, his emphasis is on the one responsible for birthing us. Not physically, but spiritually, understand. Spiritual birth.

The focus is on God. The one who has birthed us. The one who has brought about our divine birthing.

Our spiritual birthing. That's John's emphasis here. And I point this out because that helps us understand what John is going to focus on now in these three verses.

[6 : 22] And so, it has been, you know, if you think about John, and he's writing this, you know, and he ends that with born of him or of him you are born.

Then it's like John just got to thinking. Yeah, I don't really know. You know, I can't. I certainly was not there when he wrote this letter. I know sometimes when I write letters, not really letters, but email letters.

That's kind of what we do in these days. And when I'm sitting down at my computer and composing something and I'm sharing something, or if I'm writing something that I'm going to be teaching or preaching. You know, my mind is kind of fertile.

And when something comes to my mind and I write that down, it reminds me of something else. It causes me almost to insert something in my writing that I hadn't really, before that, intended.

Because what I wrote reminded me of something else. You understand that dynamic, I'm sure, as you have written letters. And I'm talking here about serious kinds of letters.

[7 : 30] Were you really bearing your soul or sharing your heart? So, you understand that dynamic. And I think we can understand that about John. Of course, he's under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But that doesn't mean that he's just acting kind of like a robot.

Or maybe a secretary who's taking dictation. The Holy Spirit moved in the hearts and lives of the Bible writers. And so, what they wrote down was inspired of God.

It's not that they just wrote it down by dictation. And so, his mind is very fertile. His heart is being moved. His life moved by the Holy Spirit. And so, his mind begins to think of something here.

And really, it is a question, I think, that comes to his mind. A question he knows the answer for. But a question that he wants us to know the answer for.

And the question is, why did God do it? This new birth, birthing us. Why did he birth you into his family?

[8 : 34] Why did he birth you into his family? And maybe you know. Maybe some think they know. Maybe you've not really thought about it very deeply.

John's about to have us think about it very deeply. Why would God do this? And when I use the word why, you know, really that word why can look backward and forward at the same time.

We kind of look backward in the sense of asking for what reason. And it kind of looks forward and asks the question for what purpose. And we can apply that here to our question.

This question about being born of him. God birthing us into his holy family. Why? Why would he do that? For what reason would he do that?

And for what purpose? Looking to the future. What purpose did he do it? Well, I think the answer comes in these three verses that I read a moment ago.

[9 : 36] Chapter 3. And we can say the short one word answer is, guess what it is? Love. I mean, you can't read those three verses without picking up on that.

You just had to think about it a while before you answered, right? And sometimes a teacher or a preacher asks a question. And those who are out there in the congregation are thinking, is this a trick question?

You know, I don't know if I... It's love. Agape love. That's the Greek word used here for love.

One of three words in the Greek language. Agape. Agape. And in the context of the Bible and in the context of God, the nature of God, this is divine love.

And what he says about that here in these three verses is meant to amaze us. And it should amaze us. And it should, but it doesn't always, does it?

[10 : 42] And that's why I'm preaching this message this morning. So that it will amaze us again. Even startle us. I mean, he wrote it in such a way that it's meant to startle us.

Behold. I mean, that's the word that's translated in the New King James. Or look with an exclamation mark. See. See what manner of love or how great a love the Father has bestowed on

us.

You know, when John was called by Jesus to be one of his apostles, he was a pretty young fellow. He could have been, some have speculated he might have been as young as 14 years old.

13, 14, maybe 15. Very young. Young teenager. Middle teens. Very, very young. And yet, when he wrote this letter, he, as I've already mentioned, he, perhaps in his middle 80s.

Kind of depends on, you know, when you decide what you think about the date of the writing of the letter. Probably in his middle 80s.

[11 : 58] Again, kind of an old fella. He's been a believer a long time. Right? Like some of you. I don't know when some of you were saved. I think about the Rossells back there.

Both of them in their 90s. You know, they've been believers a long time. And John has been a believer a long time. And after all those years of being a believer, he's still utterly amazed about the love of God.

I mean, you can't miss that here. And the point, of course, is that he wants us to be amazed as well. Startled, even. When we really think about the love of God.

Some of you might have been wondering about the title of my message. But I took the title from a hymn. A very old hymn. Written by Samuel Crossman, who was not a Baptist.

He was a minister in the Church of England back in the 1600s. So it's a very old, old, old song. And in 1664, he wrote these words to this beautiful hymn.

[13 : 09] Listen to them very carefully. This is not all of the song, but kind of picks some of the stanzas that really touched me. My song is love unknown.

My Savior's love to me. Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be. Oh, who am I that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

Here might I stay and sing of him my soul adores. Never was love, dear King. Never was grief like yours.

This is my friend in whose sweet praise I all my days would gladly spend. Beautiful. Beautiful words. And that kind of captures it, I think, a little bit.

Best we can. And again, what does John say? He says, behold, what manner of love.

[14 : 17] What manner of love the Father has bestowed on us. What manner of love. You know, I have said this a number of times as well, but when you study the Bible, any portion of Scripture, whether it's for purposes of teaching, if you're a Sunday school teacher, or preaching, like in my case, or simply just reading and studying God's Word for your own personal edification, which we all should do.

When you study any given passage of the Bible, you've heard me say this before, pay close attention to the words. I say, well, everybody knows that.

Well, not really. I'm not talking about the wording. I'm talking about individual words. Now, that's not the whole study of the Scripture. You study more than that.

But pay close attention to the words, particular words, like words that are repeated. In some passages, some Bible writers will repeat words several times, like the Apostle John has done in his, like I mentioned, the word abide, remember.

Well, pay attention to those kind of words. Pay attention to certain parts of speech, conjunctions and verbs, and even prepositions are important in understanding, discovering the meaning of the passage.

[15 : 34] Pay close attention to all parts of speech, but also, and this is the case with this passage, words that are unique in the Bible. And you can just use, you know, an everyday Bible concordance and discover that.

How many times a certain word is used in the Bible? And if a word is used, and it's a key word in a passage, and you discover that it's only used perhaps one time, sometimes that's the case.

Just one time. This is the only time the word is used. Or, as is usually the case, words that appear only a handful of times in the Bible. It's important.

And look at that. And that's the case with this word translated, manner. In the New King James, the word manner, it's translated manner.

What manner of love the Father has bestowed on us. John chose a word there that only appears seven times in all of the New Testament.

[16 : 38] And actually two times in one particular verse. So really just six places in the New Testament. Do you find this word that in the King James is translated manner? And if you go back

and look at those instances where the word is used, then you'll discover that each time it is used in association or to associate with something that creates amazement.

In some cases, jaw-dropping amazement. And let me just give you a few examples. I won't have us look at all of them. But Luke chapter 1 verse 29.

Startling amazement was Mary's reaction when the angel Gabriel just came right into her house. We don't know from the language if he walked through the door or just suddenly he's there.

I think it was just suddenly he appeared before her. And you know that part of the story.

Announcing the birth of Jesus. And the Bible says she was troubled at his saying, his greeting, what he said immediately.

And considered what manner of greeting this was. Which really focuses on the whole experience.

[17:57] What's this? Incredible. In fact, it kind of conveys the idea that, you know, it was more than a mere mortal could take in.

And if we had been there, we would have felt the same way. In fact, quite often times when angels would appear, people kind of just fall out on the ground. You know, they just don't know what to say. I mean, they just kind of black out. I mean, you know, that kind of startling amazement. And how about this one? Mark 13, verse 1.

And here the word appears twice in the verse. Jesus and his disciples. And we studied Luke's version of this not too long ago. But Jesus and his disciples have left the temple for the last time.

And they're going out of Jerusalem. Eventually to make their way over to the Garden of Gethsemane. And very soon after that, Jesus will be arrested and crucified.

[18:58] But they're coming out of the temple and out of Jerusalem. And Mark 13, verse 1 says, And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, Teacher, see or behold, look, what manner of stones and what manner of buildings are here.

And he's referring to the temple, the temple mount, which would have been at that point high above him as they're walking out through the eastern gate and down into the Kidron Valley and eventually up the slopes of Mount Olivet.

And so I think at some point as they came out of the gate, the disciples are looking back at this beautiful edifice, the temple, you know.

And the disciples say, look, how amazing this is. Incredible, the stones and the buildings and all of that.

And so, you know, they're just absolutely amazed by that. And of course, Herod's temple, we learned from other historians, Josephus for one.

[20:15] Well, Herod's temple was one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world. And even though in Jesus' day, it was not even yet finished, completed.

In fact, it had been in construction for 50 years before Jesus came on the scene. And it would be another 40 years before it was completed.

And they completed just in time for Titus to come marching in and tear it down. You know, not leaving one block on another. So it had been in construction a long time and it was incredible.

Incredible. But Herod's temple, again, was one of the wonders of the ancient world. And the disciples stood there in amazement, you know, wide-eyed as they looked up at that magnificent edifice.

The eastern wall, they say, was covered with gold. The temple as a whole was huge, enormous, spread out over 35 acres.

[21:23] Can you imagine that? The outer courtyards were huge. You could put 30 football fields in the outer courts of the temple.

Can you imagine that? Tens of thousands of people could come into the temple courtyards and be there and have plenty of room for more. And according to the historian Josephus, some of the stones used in the temple's construction were 37 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet thick.

Incredible. So I think we can understand why these very common men, some of them fishermen from Galilee, who probably had only seen the temple maybe one time in their lifetime, maybe some of them had never seen it.

I think we can understand why they would be amazed by this thing, this magnificent temple. It took their breath away. That's why Mark used the word.

That kind of loses some of its significance in the English. But in the Greek, it's startling. Amazing.

But there are two other times in the New Testament where this word is used to describe something,

describe the reaction to something far more great than buildings and even greater than an angel. [22 : 53] And, of course, one of them is here in our passage, 1 John 3, and we'll get back to that. But the other one is in Matthew 8, verse 27. And I love this example.

Matthew 8, 27. The disciples are with Jesus. And they're in a boat out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee somewhere in the midst of a storm.

Raging storm. A raging storm at sea. Let me start reading in verse 24, Matthew 8. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea so that the boat was covered with the waves.

But he was asleep. Jesus was asleep in the boat. Then his disciples came to him and awoke him. But he said to them, Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?

Then he arose. He stood up, rebuked, verbally rebuked the winds and the sea. And there was suddenly a great calm. Incredible miracle.

[23 : 58] But notice the reaction. So the men marveled. Saying, What manner of man is this?

What manner of man is this? That even the winds and the sea obey him. It's certainly one of those jaw-dropping moments. In fact, one of the other accounts said, Get away from us.

We can't handle this. And that's right. They had no reference point at all in their minds and in the experience of life. They had no reference point for anything like this.

Or anyone like this. They were dumbfounded. They were even in shock. Traumatized. By what Jesus did.

And by who he was. And then here in our passage for this morning. That kind of helps us understand the strength of this word.

[24 : 59] John uses this word to, I think, kind of jar us out of our complacency. Lethargy. Lethargy, rather.

Kind of wake us up. I mean, what's wrong with us? What's wrong with us? Doesn't anything about God ever amaze us anymore? Certainly his love should.

In fact, because it's just, there's no possible way for us in this life to ever completely get a hold of this. We spend all of our lifetimes in amazement of it.

John had lived all those years. And he still was shocked by this, startled by this reality about the love of God. He hadn't really got a hold of all of it.

In fact, I think John felt a little bit like the guy who saw the ocean for the first time. Do you remember when you saw the ocean for the first time? I guess every time I'm able to go back, and it's not very often, I'm still kind of amazed by it, you know.

[26 : 05] But this guy, you know, he lived in a village, small little village, hundreds of miles from the ocean. And all of his life, he'd never had the opportunity to go.

And as an older man, he finally was able to see the ocean. And he stood there on the beach, looking out at that ocean. He was dumbfounded by its immensity.

And he stood there gazing at its vastness. And he thought to himself, he said, he thought, I must share this with my people back home. And so he looked around on the beach, and he found a pretty good-sized shell.

And he took that shell, and he scooped some of that ocean water out in the shell. And then he said, I'll take this water back with me and show my people what the ocean is like.

Can you imagine? It's the best he could do. And that's, I think, kind of like what John is having us do here.

[27 : 08] You can never really comprehend it all. And that's why he used the language he used. And let me read it again in the New American Standard Version. Behold, how great a love the Father has bestowed on us.

The NIV, I like it. It says, has lavished, lavished on us. I mean, you know, sometimes the word lavish carries the idea of wasting some of it.

Now, God hasn't wasted any of his love. But, you know, sometimes lavish means, you know, it's poured out and it's spilling over, and some of it's wasted, you know. That really is the idea here.

All right, so that's all introduction. All introduction to three very simple, very simple points in my message. And there are three things about what God's great love accomplishes in our lives that we ought to remember.

It's the best. It really is the best. It's kind of the ocean in the shell, you know. It is kind of the drop in the bucket.

[28 : 20] You use that metaphor. Three things. And here's the first one. It is a love that places you in the family of God.

Well, that's pretty simple, isn't it? Not profound. It's the love of God that places you in the family of God.

That's the first and most important accomplishment of God's love. Places you in the family of God. What did John say? Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God.

Now, the sad thing is that doesn't really amaze us much. But it should. That he would call us children of God.

And then, as I mentioned, the better and older manuscripts, and this comes out in some of our more modern translations, they include the words, and so we are. Because there might be some who would argue that we become children of God sometime out in the future.

[29 : 30] Maybe when we get to heaven. But no. Behold, what manner of love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called children, ones begotten, birthed.

We should be called the ones birthed of God. And so we are. We are. We are right now. At least I hope you are.

And so this goes, I think, right along with how John ends the last chapter, as I mentioned earlier. We are born of him. We are born of him.

That is the, essentially what children of God means here in the verse. It really means the same idea. Because, listen, all people are not children of God.

We are not all God's children. We are just not. Because the children of God are those who have been born of him. Not physically born.

[30 : 33] But the new birth. The spiritual birth. Jesus said to Nicodemus, who had been born physically years before this, he said, Nicodemus, you must be born again.

You know, Nicodemus had a little hard time understanding that concept. And Jesus went on to explain it. And so to be a Christian means that you have had a birth experience.

Have you? A new birth. A birth experience. A spiritual birth. And to be born of God means that you now have, as a part of you, a very vital part of you, the very nature of your father.

That, by the way, is the evidence of that new birth. You have in you and expressed in you the very nature of your father, your heavenly father.

That's just what it means. It means that physically. It means that spiritually. 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 3 and 4. Listen to this. As his divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

[31 : 40] And he doesn't use the word birth there, but that's the idea. That's what he's talking about. Given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Through the knowledge of him who called us to buy glory and virtue.

By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises. That through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.

That's who we are. We have the nature of God in us. Our father. Now, again, why would he do this? Why would he do this for us? Not because we are loving back to him. At least not initially. As John is going to tell us later.

We love him because he first loved us. They didn't do this because we're loving. Loving people. And we love you, God. So birth us into your family.

[32 : 44] He didn't do it because of that. He also didn't do it because we're lovely. You know, worthy of love. His love. We're not any of those things.

We're not. So why would God do this for us? Because of his love. His love. A love that's not connected to anything in us or about us.

I mean, completely independent from anything in us. Or even potentially in us. He lavishly bestowed on us his gracious, unlimited, sovereign, unmerited, saving love.

He did that. And listen, apart from God doing this for us, we wouldn't even know him. We wouldn't even know anything about him or this kind of love, certainly.

And that's why John said in the rest of that verse, in verse 1, Therefore the world does not know us. Why? Because they don't know him. You know, the world thinks they know us.

[33 : 53] And what they think they know, they don't like. But they don't really know who we are. Not yet. As we're going to learn a little bit later, they will know one day.

So it's a divine love. A love that places you in the family of God. Don't ever get over that. It isn't about you. Or anything you've done. Or anything good about you. Or anything that you may one day become. God placed you in his family. Because he loves you. Second, it is a love that promises you a future with God. Now John goes all the way to the end of it. I mean, now he's talking about the beginning of it. Now he's going all the way to the end of it. The future. Our glorious future. Look at verse 2. Beloved, now we are children of God. Amen. [34 : 50] Praise the Lord. That's who we are. And it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. Alright, so it's coming what we shall be.

But we don't understand it yet. We may have a little bit of an understanding. We have some clues in the Bible. Some big ones right here in this passage. But we don't really understand it. Not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know. So this is something we do know. That when he is revealed. That is when Jesus comes again. We shall be like him. For we shall see him as he is. We shall be like him. John's talking about our future glory. Glorification. And John is saying, look at this. He said, look at it.

[35 : 47] Take it all in if you can. If you can. The great love of the Father that has been lavished upon us. And so you see, at some point in the past.

This is where John begins. At some point in the past. The Father's love birthed you into his holy family. And then on the other end of the spectrum. At some point in the future. When Jesus appears the second time. The Father's love will transform you into the very likeness of his son Jesus. Just like that.

There is a progressing to that in between. But when Jesus appears. Boom. Wherever you are in the process. It will be completed. When Jesus appears.

God has promised it. He's promised to bring about a dramatic transformation. A future glory for everyone who has been born again.

[36 : 45] Birthed of him. His love has promised this future for us. I mean, this is wonderful. Philippians chapter 1 verse 6.

Let me read it in the ESV. And I am sure of this. Paul said that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. Will.

And when. Well, he tells us. At the day of Jesus Christ. What day is that? When he returns. When he comes again.

Romans 8.29. Those whom he foreknew. He also predestined. And for a lot of people, they can't get past that word predestined. And so they don't read the rest of it. Predestined what?

To become conformed to the image of his son. I'm predestined to that. God's not going to fail in that.

[37 : 45] He's not going to fail. So don't worry about it. Some people are thinking. Maybe some of you are thinking. You know. You know. I don't really measure up.

I'm not really all that much like Jesus. As I kind of think I ought to be. So we get kind of concerned about that.

We read passages like this. That we'll be conformed to the image of his son. And we're thinking. Well, man. I've got a long way to go. Well, you do.

So do I. We all do. But I can guarantee you. Based upon the word of God. That when Jesus comes. It'll be done. You will be.

Just like Jesus. So don't worry about it. But now having said that. God does demand something of us in.

[38 : 41] In between. And so that leads us to the third and final point. It is a love that persuades you to be faithful. Before God.

Faithful. Always faithful. Before God. Growing in your faith. Before God. It is a love. That puts you into the family of God. It's a love. That will transform you. Into the very life of Christ.

And in between. It's a love that persuades you. Prompts you. Encourages you. Pushes you on. To be faithful. And more faithful to God. To grow in your faith.

And really when you put all that together. That's what John is doing. He's giving us kind of a complete picture. Of the entire Christian life. What the Christian life consists of. From the past. Our new birth.

To the future. Our glorification. And in between. He includes the present. Our faithfulness. Our growing in faith.

[39 : 38] And so look at it. Verse 3. And everyone who has this hope in him. Purifies himself. Just as he is pure. The new American standard renders it.

Has this hope fixed on him. Fixed. This fixed hope. Will purify himself. Now what is this hope? Well it's what he talked about in the preceding verse. It's the coming of Christ. Our blessed hope. Hope. And by the way.

Hope in the context of the Christian. Is never a hope so. You know. Maybe it'll happen. Maybe it won't. You know. The believer's hope is a sure thing.

All right. It's our hope. Our blessed hope. And the hope here. Is specifically the return. Of Jesus Christ. His appearing. His revealing. He is coming for us.

[40 : 35] What manner of love. He's coming. Why? For us. What a vital connection.

I don't know if you've ever considered this. But what a vital connection exists. Between the doctrine of the second coming. What the Bible teaches about the second coming.

And the practical moral purity of God's people. There's a vital connection between those two things. In fact someone has said that the congregation.

That never ever hears about the second coming. Of the Lord. Is a congregation that will suffer morally. As a result. Interesting isn't it? There's something about.

The expectation. Of Jesus return. And the fact that God in his providence. Didn't tell us when it would be. It could be at any moment.

[41 : 34] What an effect. That has upon the way we live. Or should. The more we anticipate the coming of our Lord.

The more we desire. To live in moral purity. Because it may be today. And I don't want Jesus to catch me. Somewhere we're out not to be.

Or doing what I shouldn't be doing. Even thinking things that I shouldn't be thinking. I mean if we really believe. That Jesus may come at any moment.

Appear at any moment. Then. It affects the way we live. So let's sum all this up. In a way that we can remember it.

Okay. Simple way to remember this. Because. Because. Of his. Great love lavished on us. These three things.

[42 : 30] You. Are not. What you used to be. Right. Because of his love. You are not what you used to be. Nor.

Are you. What you one day will be. That's number two. You're not what you used to be. You. Nor are you. What you one day will be. And for now.

Seek to be. What you ought to be. That's pretty simple. Isn't it? You're not what you. Used to be. You're not what you.

Will. Be. One day. Seek. Now. To be. What you ought to be. Amazing love. How can it be. That you. My king. Would die for me. You know that. Amazing love. I know it's true. It's my joy. To honor you. In all I do.

[43 : 32] I honor you.

Thank you.