

You are Loved
Series: Lifted UP!
1 John 3:1-10; John 8:1-11
September 11, 2016

Thanks again for being here today.

This is a unique day, isn't it? Pro football fans are excited that football has returned. Our fantasy teams are picked and lineups set, even in the Germantown United Methodist Fantasy Football league. Today, Vicky Cook debuts in her first week against Kevin Desch, while Chris Kitchel goes up against the First Lady Myra. Steve Cook's Roman Rebels meets up with Sheven Williams' Tailgaters, and Shane Hannah's Super Team battles Emory Askins Bengal heavy "WhoDey" team. And I go up against Theresa Fieinger's team, and while we are all Christian, I'm definitely going to kill Theresa. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

So you go from all that Fantasy Football silliness to the real-life 15th anniversary of 9/11, where almost 3,000 people lost their lives and over 6,000 people were injured, and where all of our lives changed. The images of the day are still burned into our minds. I had my pilot's license back then and had flown my son Matt and his buddy Jonathon a couple of days before. I remember thinking these boys would enjoy the rollercoaster feeling of doing some stalls, but I was mistaken. Those were carefree times. And then 9/11. It was a month before I got back up into the air, and it was definitely different.

So today, we have this incredible contrast. Remembering men and women who died because they were Americans. Watching men play a simple game. And in the midst, taking a look at ourselves to see who we lift up to the status of celebrity and why.

You see, we have some interesting ways we recognize stardom, heroes, and greatness. We hold up, almost worship people for what they can do as athletes or as singers or actors. We elevate people who are outlandish in their behavior and appetites. We look up to people who can do things that we mere mortals cannot. But these are only the select few.

Think about it this way. Our Valley View Spartans are 3-0, basically crushing their opponents. Of all the young men on that team and the hundreds of thousands of other high school football players, there will be very few if any who are offered a scholarship and given the opportunity to play college football. And of all the tens of thousands of young men who were on college gridirons yesterday, only 1,700 will even make it to the NFL, and then still only a 140 or so will be individually picked in the church's fantasy football league. Yet we lift up these people to star status.

All this means one thing: in a world that celebrates stardom, you and I mean nothing. We're nothing because we can't swim or run the fastest, or throw the ball the fastest or farthest, or sing the loudest and highest, or do the craziest stuff. We are nothing in a star crazed system.

But there is another system out there, one entirely different than our pop culture system. And instead of lifting the best, brightest, and beautiful, it strives to lift up... everyone... through the lowly act of One.

Today, we begin a new series entitled "Lifted UP!" We are going to look at a completely different system that started in the strangest way.

And this system is seen best in something that a traveling preacher from Galilee once said:

“And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”¹

Jesus of Nazareth said those words just before He was lifted up on a Roman cross to be crucified. But how can a man condemned as a criminal lift up the rest of us?

One of the great blessings about being a pastor is the opportunity to rejoice with the parents when a new baby is born. I enjoy visiting the mother and her baby on the day of birth. What a joy it is to look into the face of a newborn baby and to think of the wondrous possibilities existing in that new life.

Another great blessing is to pray the sinner’s prayer with someone and see the change that occurs as they raise their head. What joy it is to look into the face of one just born again with the touch of the Spirit fresh in their life and to think of the wondrous possibilities now existing in that new life.

In the book of 1 John, we read some incredible words that illustrate who we can be if we indeed come to Jesus and receive new birth. I invite you to join me and looking at 1 John 3. We are going to look at the first 3 verses, and I will be reading from the New Living Translation.

READ 1 JOHN 3:1-3

There are three questions I want us to answer here in thinking about being Lifted UP!

Look again at verse 1.

*See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!*²

Immediately, we are told the answer to the first question “What are we?” And what is the answer? Yes, that we are God’s children.

The word “see” here is the Greek word *idou*, and it means to sense and see with awakened understanding. It calls one to stop and ponder this amazing truth. What we are to sense, see and marvel at is the great love God has given us.

As believers, our self-worth is based not on whether you are the biggest, fastest, brightest, funniest. In fact, most of us are not. Instead, most if not all of us are losers compared to the stars, especially those who have made some big life mistakes.

No. As believers, our self-worth is based on the fact that God loves us and calls us His children. We are His children now, not just sometime in the distant future.

Put your finger there in your Bible and turn with me to see Romans 8:14-17.

READ ROMANS 8:14-17

What are we? We are God’s children. And this is not based on anything we have done. It is based on the earth shattering event when Christ was lifted up, and through that act, we too can be lifted up.

PLENTY WHO FEEL THERE ARE ONLY MEANT FOR THE GUTTER.

YOU CAN BE GOD’S CHILD THROUGH CHRIST.

Have you ever made a decision about whether or not someone loves you by the Daisy Petal Test? I can recall such an experience during my grade school years. A girl I had a crush on sat down near me and I watched her pull the petals off a flower saying

¹ John 12:32 (NLT)

² 1 John 3:1a (NLT)

“He loves me, He loves me not.” I also remember “the look” when she pulled the last petal off as she said “He loves me not.”

It reminds me of a little girl who came running into the house one morning, sobbing. Her mother asked “Why, dear, what’s wrong?” Throwing herself into her mother’s arms, she cried, “God doesn’t love me anymore.” “Certainly He does,” the mother said reassuringly. “No, He doesn’t,” the child sobbed. “I know He doesn’t because I tried Him with daisy petals.”

There’s a much better and more reliable way to know if God loves us! It’s in considering all He does for us. And if there is still any doubt, think of what He did to save us! The Bible says in Romans 5:8:

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*³

We can know what we are: children of God.

Turn back to 1 John 3 and look at verse 2 to answer our second question, which is “What We Will Be?”

*Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.*⁴

The emphasis in verse 2 is on what the children of God will be in the future. The reference here is, of course, to the time of Christ’s coming for His church. Having spoken of our present dignity as children of God, John now speaks of our future destiny.

Our privileged opportunities in this world are understandable and within the reach of all who will lay hold of them by abiding in Christ, but the reluctant glories in the world to come are still veiled. For the blessings there are connected with the responsibilities here. The fact that God expects future development as is seen in verse 1 is seen again in verse 2 where we are addressed as children of God.

Child implies that future development is to be expected. A child has such potential. We look at them with hope and expectation but do not know how they will turn out. Some who seem to have so much potential and opportunity throw away their lives. Others you don’t think will amount to much accomplish great things.

But the child of God will be made to be like Christ. Let that sink in for a moment. You as a child of God through Christ are to be made to be like Christ. If you think that all of Christianity is just to be saved and coast the rest of the way, then you are not following the Christianity of the Bible. We are continually being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

I have been a Christian for 44 years now, and I am more like Christ today than I was when I was my first day as a child of God. And that is not to brag about me, but only to brag about what God has done in me.

In her book “God by Moonlight”, Amy Carmichael describes an atlas moth emerging from its cocoon in the mountain forests west of Dohnavur, India. She writes, “It hangs from a twig, like a small brown bag... and however often we see it we are never prepared for the miracle that emerges... It has wings of crimson and pink, and blended green of various soft tones, shading off into terra-cotta, brown, old-gold. Each wing has a window made of a clear substance like a delicate flake of talc, and on the

³ Romans 5:8 (NIV)

⁴ 1 John 3:2 (NLT)

edge of each is a pattern of wavy lines or dots, or some other dainty device. From wing-tip to wing-tip, nine, sometimes ten, inches of beauty, one of God's lovely wonders – that is what comes out of the brown paper bag.”

Who would think that such exquisite beauty could come from a drab dull cocoon? But a much greater miracle awaits the child of God! We once lived in the “brown bag” we called life, but when we were drawn to Christ, He lifted US and He wants to make us into beautiful butterflies.

God's love for us does not stop with the new birth. He continues ministering to us and transforming us into His image until the revelation of Jesus Christ causes the full, culminating revelation of who we are in Him.

The Apostle John does not stop here. He has told us what we are, what we will be and now in verse 3 he tells us what we should be.

READ 1 JOHN 3:3

Verse 3 teaches us that if we hope in our transformation at the return of Christ, we should keep on purifying our lives. Everyone who has this hope purifies, or frees oneself from contamination.

The word purify is the Greek word *hagnos* and means cleanliness of heart, soul and spirit; of thought, word, and action.

John is telling us we must totally surrender to God so that by His grace we may separate ourselves from all that defiles. And because purify is in the present tense, it denotes a continuous process.

Our goal for purity is to be pure just as Christ is pure. We are not to judge our purity or lives by other people, but by Christ, who is the standard or goal toward which we are to move. God's desire is that we be conformed to the image of Christ.

All this work of transformation is because of the Father's love. Because the Father loved us and sent His Son to die for us, we are children of God. Because God loves us and lives within us, He wants us to live with Him one day. Salvation, from start to finish, is an expression of the love of God. We are saved by the grace of God⁵, but the provision for our salvation was originated in the love of God.

All because Jesus was lifted up, we can be Lifted UP!

Once, Jesus came across a man who was born blind. In that day, people believed that bad things happened to you because of sin. Jesus' disciples even asked the question, “Why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?”⁶

They were so concerned about the possibility of failure that they missed the opportunity that a man could be Lifted UP!

COMMENT

Jesus wants to turn your blindness into sight, to turn the life you think only deserves the gutter into a life Lifted UP! To transform a life of sinner in a brown bag into a butterfly, to become one like Christ.

But it only happens if you lift Jesus up in your life.

⁵ See Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 2:11-15

⁶ John 9:2 (NLT)