

One day the reformer Martin Luther was feeling rather down. The Pope was after him. His colleagues were bickering among themselves. He felt the heavy pressure that came with being a professor, pastor, and father. And he was in excruciating pain from kidney stones. As he moped around the house muttering underneath his breath, his wife Katherine announced in a solemn voice, "God is dead." Luther looked at his wife with puzzlement and replied, "God is not dead!" Katherine went on to say, "It sure seems like God is dead by the way you are acting." Luther thanked his wife and etched a Latin word on his desk: *vivit*. *Vivit* means, "He lives." Whenever things weren't going well and Luther was tempted to complain about them, he looked at that one simple word and was invigorated. Because Jesus was alive Luther had every reason to be upbeat. On this Reformation Sunday we have every reason to be upbeat, no matter how outwardly dark your life might be. The Apostle John tells us what Katherine told Luther: "Cheer up, Christian! You are a child of God. Jesus is alive". John urges us to cheer up no matter what our circumstances or our prospects because we are God's children, and because we will soon exchange our cross for a crown.

In the opening verse of our text the Apostle John sounds like a child who has just received a surprise package in the mail. He is hardly able to contain his excitement as he exclaims: "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!" (1 John 3:1a) Do we get that excited when contemplating God's love? Do we sing the Gloria In Excelsis (or its equivalent) with gusto, or polite indifference after hearing that our sins have been forgiven? Just how great is God's love? Well, what would you do with a pet dog that had become rabid and attacked your family? Would you keep it? Would you let it have free reign of your house, eat at your table, and sleep in your bed? No! Wouldn't you have that dog destroyed? You certainly wouldn't send away one of your children so you could keep the dog! Yet that's what God did. He sent his Son away to die on the cross so that he could adopt us sinfully rabid and rebellious people and welcome us into his home! It's no wonder John exclaimed: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"

One of the things that bothers me about programs like AA or NA is how a participant who is a Christian introduces himself or herself. "Hi My name is Bob and I'm an addict or an alcoholic." It is like saying "I am not worth much" in your opening comments. Christian Addict or alcoholic. You are not a derelict, you are not a bum, you are not a drunkard, you are not a pervert, you are not an alcoholic, you are not a drug addict, you are not a pimp. You are a child of God." Granted you need to acknowledge you have a problem, but what a self-deflating opening statement. A Christian Addict or Alcoholic is a child of God who is struggling to overcome a bondage to alcohol or other drugs. These people are not sinners in the hand of an angry God, but saints who have sinned, and they rest in the hands of a loving God.

Martin Luther, for years of his life felt like an alcoholic or addict. Martin Luther felt guilt and shame for the things he had done wrong in his life. Like an addict or alcoholic, he tried to do a step 9 by making amends for the wrongs he had done. He tried as best he could to do what God wanted. He entered a monastery. He beat himself, he prayed, he worshiped. He would do

all he could to escape God's wrath.

He struggled and struggled with this, until as a Professor he sat down and studied Romans 1. In it he read that in the Gospel a righteousness has come to us from God - by faith. At that point Luther said to himself, "the Gospel is the good news that Jesus lived a perfect life as my substitute, and that he died on the cross. He didn't die for Himself, so He must have died for me. How does His righteousness become mine? Not by beating myself and trying to reform my life, but simply by faith in Jesus! All that He has becomes mine through faith! He became what He was not - sin - so that I would become what I was not - righteous!" This "tower experience" set him free from the deceit that he had been put under for his whole life - that he had to punish himself for his sins - and set himself free from God's wrath. Luther discerned the truth, that a man is saved by God's grace through faith. He saw the Pope's teaching for what it was, a devastating eternal error. He was a child of God of God alone through faith in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, if God has adopted us into his family, we should expect to receive good things from him right? I mean if we were adopted into the family of a billionaire, we would expect to drive a fancy car and wear nice clothes. Should we expect anything less from God? Why then doesn't anyone here live the charmed life of the rich and famous? Could it be that we're not God's children? No. Our baptism and the faith God created or strengthened there assure us that we are his children. So why isn't life sweeter for us who are members of God's family? One reason is because the world does not know that we are God's children. John said, "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him" Just think of how the world treated Jesus; they laughed at his claims, beat him, and eventually murdered him. If that's the way Jesus was treated we shouldn't expect to be treated any better by the world. Indeed that was the case with Peter and John. They had been thrown in prison because they were believers.

While we can understand that we'll be persecuted and mocked by unbelievers, we may wonder why God doesn't at least protect us from cuts, bruises, and diseases if we are his children? The Bible makes it clear that God uses those things to purify our faith and make it stronger. You see we are like rough diamonds. Before we can shine with brilliance we need to be expertly cut and polished. That's what God is doing with the trials he allows into our life. Oh, don't worry. God will never cut us so deeply that we lose our faith. He paid dearly to make us his child and he promises that the cross you now carry will soon be exchanged for a crown!

I'm not kidding when I say that God is preparing us for a brilliant future and that we will receive a crown. John said in our text, "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" (1 John 3:2). John wants us to be certain that God has something better in store for us than life in this world. Exactly what that is will be revealed when Christ reappears. We may not look like much, act like much or amount to much in the eyes of the world right now, but that's because we don't belong to this world. We belong to a far country, and to a city built without human hands, whose builder and maker is God! Let the world party on! I'm going to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Let the world have its riches and wealth! I'm going to a place where the wealth of this world is used to pave the streets that I will walk on. Let the

world sing of its heroes and call them little gods! I know the one and only Living God, and He has given me Hero status. Let the world live in darkness and sin! I have been set free from the bondage of sin, and Jesus has brought me into His marvelous light.

What a wonderful day that will be when we get to see Jesus with our own eyes and see him as he really is in all of his glory. That will be some sight. Consider how John described Jesus in the book of Revelation. “11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True... 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”

While we probably won't look exactly like Jesus did in this vision, we do know that come Judgment Day we will shine like Jesus and that we will rule with him over those who persecute and mock us for our faith now. While we look forward to finding out exactly what's all in store for us, John goes on to tell us that we are to start being like Jesus right now. John wrote: “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). John is not suggesting that we need to become pure to earn our salvation. No. Salvation comes from having hope in Jesus who has accomplished our salvation and granted free and full forgiveness (1 John 3:3). Still, those who have faith in Jesus will attempt to rid their lives of all that is impure. This means that we won't make excuses for our pet sins. Nor will we promise to give up certain sins when it's convenient for us. No. We will do those things right now! We will be patient with one another, now. We will be forgiving, today. We will stop feeding our lusts, immediately. We will make the study of God's Word a priority, without delay. We will strive to be like Jesus now because we are God's children.

Of course we know that we'll never become like Jesus here, not until he comes to take us home to heaven. So it can be downright frustrating to fall back into the same sins. When we get down about that though we only need to pause and remember that we are God's children through faith, not through works. Jesus forgives us for our failed attempts to be pure as he is pure. And since we are God's children we also can be certain that some day soon we will exchange our cross, whether that's persecution, sickness, or bad relationships for a crown. So cheer up, Christian! Our God lives and reigns. So do we.