

“Celebrating the Significance of a Christian Life”

September 11, 2011

Text: 1 John 2:12-14

In Exodus 15, Moses had just led Israel safely through the Red Sea, out of the reach of Pharaoh’s chariots.

* Moses/Israel celebrated with a spontaneous poetic declaration=>

“I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. / The LORD is my strength & song, And He has become my salvation” (Ex 15:1-2).

* In 1 Sam 2, God had just delivered Hannah from the embarrassment/shame of barrenness, & the mockery of her rival, Peninnah.

Hannah too celebrated with a poetic prayer of rejoicing=>

“My heart exults in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, Because I rejoice in Thy salvation” (2:1).

* In Lk 1, Mary also rejoiced poetically because of Gabriel’s news that God had chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah=>

“My soul exalts the Lord, / And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. / For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed” (1:46-48).

In today’s text, we come to another such poem of celebration.

At first, as I began to study it, I couldn’t figure out why John would suddenly drop a poem into the middle of an epistle written to warn Xns against an early version of Gnosticism.

But eventually, it became clear that this too is a celebration, of blessings God gives to Xns.

That’s a welcome relief after a series of tests by which we evaluate whether/not we really know X, and are born again.

Up to this point, 1 John has been full of “if” clauses=>

* If this is true of you, you’re saved.

* If not, you’re not.

E.g. 1 Jn 1:6=> *“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; / but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”*

In chapter 2, John has given us 3 main tests of true Xnity=>

Do we keep X’s commands? Do we imitate His life?

Do we love our brothers/sisters in X?

These tests might leave us feeling that our hope of salvation is tenuous/precarious at best, because none of us passes them w/ a perfect score.

But John's purpose is not to create doubts about our Xnity/salvation.

Instead, as he says in I Jn 5:13, "*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.*"

He isn't guaranteeing that every single person who reads his letter is saved (some aren't), and it's not any man's right to assure another of his salvation (only the H.S. can rightly do that).

But he's pointing out the obvious difference between the unregenerated Gnostics, & the truly redeemed majority of believers who fill the churches to which he is writing.

Gnostics had good reason to question/doubt their salvation, believers don't.

For Xns, the news is all good, & needs to be celebrated with a song/poem, just as Moses/Hannah/Mary celebrated.

And so we find such a poem in the middle of I John 2.

John is saying, Look at what God has done for you, then rejoice in the confidence of your salvation.

And rejoice too in what He is doing w/i you even now.

John's poem consists of 2 stanzas, w/ 3 lines in each stanza.

Each line begins with either the words "*I am writing*" (stanza 1) or "*I have written*" (stanza 2.)

Each line is addressed to Xns at a certain level of maturity.

* 2 lines are addressed to "*children*"—immature Xns.

* 2 lines to "*young men*"—maturing Xns.

* 2 lines to "*fathers*"—spiritually mature Xns.

Every line explains some blessing/privilege/asset that is characteristic of the Xns in that particular maturity group.

And each one of these blessings is permanent in the lives of those who enjoy it, as indicated by the perfect tense verbs.

The perfect tense refers to things that have happened in the past, but which continue to happen and bear consequences in the present.

E.g. John says, "*Your sins are forgiven*" & the perfect tense means "they were forgiven in the past, and they are still forgiven now."

Other perfect-tense blessings include "*you know Him*" (you came to know X in the past, & you still do), "*you have overcome the evil one*" (& still overcome) "*you are strong*" (you were, & you still are) and "*the word of God abides in you*" (it did, & it still does).

There is another blessing inherent in these lines, which also becomes another assurance of our salvation—growth.

I grew up thinking I lost my salvation whenever I sinned, so I was constantly seeking to simply get saved again.

I never even occurred to me that I could grow in the faith.

What a relief it was to discover I was eternally secure and could actually grow up in my faith!

In our text, we see a Xn life growing from childhood, to youth, to fatherhood.

It's an assurance of what Paul writes in Phil 1:6=>

"I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

Where there is growth, we know there must be life.

So not only does our own personal growth reassure us that we have the life of God working w/i us;

It also shows us what we have to look forward to=>

If we're spiritual children, we can become strong young men/women of the faith.

If we're young men/women, we can become mature fathers/mothers, spiritually.

This is all good news, cause for rejoicing/celebration.

It differentiates those who are truly saved, from people like the Gnostics, who only thought they were.

Being such good news, John communicates it, in a triumphant two-stanza poem.

*** Stanza 1**

Little children (those of any age who haven't matured spiritually, perhaps because they simply haven't been Xns very long).

[1 John 2:12] (John)=> *"I am writing to you, **little children**, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake."*

Most spiritual children haven't been Xns long enough to fully understand all the doctrinal issues, but they know that their sins have been forgiven, & they rejoice in that.

They prob. know little/nothing about the meaning of election, justification, propitiation, or sanctification.

But they know they once felt the suffocating burden of their sin, and now they don't!

They cried out to Jesus, asking Him to forgive it, in their own version of the publican's prayer, *"God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"* (Lk 18:13).

They repented of their sin, and believed in Jesus' name for its forgiveness.

Somehow God communicated to their hearts what Nathan told David (II Sam 12:13), “*The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.*”

They felt relieved, like the character Christian did in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, when the terrible burden he carried on his back was taken off.

They could sing wholeheartedly with Charles Wesley=>

“My chains fell off, My heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

They were just as saved at that moment as an Apostle, and they would never again be condemned for their sin.

The H.S. assured them that God had adopted them as His own children, & their hearts cried out joyfully, “*Abba Father!*”

These spiritual newborns may not have a well developed theology at the time of their conversion, but they know their sins are forgiven “for His [Jesus’] name’s sake.”

They aren’t forgiven because of anything they have ever done, or were, or ever hope to become.

Nor are they forgiven because of anything they have suffered, or any holy feelings they’ve ever felt.

They aren’t forgiven because of anything about themselves at all.

They are forgiven for the sake of Jesus’ name.

That refers to everything God has revealed to us in His Word about Jesus, that can be summed up in His name=>

*His being our Prophet/Priest/King/Savior/Lord/Messiah.

*His glorious Person and perfect/sinless life,

*His atoning death, that paid the penalty for our sins.

*His resurrection & intercession-for-us-with God, as our Advocate.

God graciously forgives us because of all these wonderful truths about X, when we identify w/ Jesus by faith.

The heart of a newly-saved child of God glows with gratitude, knowing that his sins are forgiven.

As far as he is concerned at that moment, this remission of his sins is the greatest/most-desirable blessing he could ever receive.

In a sense, he’s right of course, because, as Jesus said=>

“*What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? / For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*”

(Mk 8:36-37).

And yet, there are many other precious blessings that belong to this spiritual newborn, which he has yet to discover.

He has become an heir of God, who will inherit all things.

But for now, we say simply, “Little child of God, go ahead and rejoice all you want, in your newfound forgiveness/salvation.”

Fathers

[Verse 13a] (John)=> *“I am writing to you, **fathers**, because you know Him who has been from the beginning.”*

Fathers were once children themselves, but through the power of the H.S., and the application of God’s Word to their hearts/lives, their faith has matured.

John says of these mature believers (both men/women)=>

*“You **know Him** who has been from the beginning.”*

In a sense, that’s true of every believer, because to know X is synonymous w/ being saved.

John made that very clear, back in 1 Jn 2:3.

But “fathers of the faith” have developed a deep knowledge of X.

This is the kind of knowledge Paul coveted, as he said in Phil 3:10=>

*“That I may **know Him**, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”*

These “fathers” of the faith can be women a/w/a men—like Hannah/Naomi (in the OT);

Or Mary/Tabitha (in the NT).

Through their knowledge of X, spiritual fathers have come to know God, and they have become fixated on His character, on the depths of His glory, and on His mighty deeds.

They are like David, who wrote in Psa 63=>

*“When I remember Thee on my bed, I **meditate on Thee** in the night watches, / For Thou hast been my help, And in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy. / My soul clings to Thee; Thy right hand upholds me” (Psa 63:6-8).*

Someone: “C’mon, get real! No one really thinks/talks like that!?”

He might not know anyone who does;

* But David did.

* John did, and according to him, all fathers of the faith do (he being a father of the faith himself).

* We should all aspire to think/pray like that.

For fathers of the faith, God becomes the focal-point of their whole existence and their entire lives.

You hear this in the words of the sons of Korah, who in Psa 42:8, referred to God as *“my life.”*

You hear it in Paul’s words in Phil 1:21=> *“For to me to live is Christ.”*

Fathers of the faith are ever mindful of the fact that “*they know* [have a personal relationship with] *Him who has been from the beginning,*” the One who is timeless/eternal; who started it all, will end it all, & sustains it all in the meantime.

They know X, and in knowing X, they know God—personally!

Their souls revel in words such as those in Psa 102=>

“Of old Thou didst found the earth; And the heavens are the work of Thy hands. / Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing Thou wilt change them, & they will be changed. / But Thou art the same, And Thy years will not come to an end” (Psa 102:25-27).

During our study of the names of God in Sunday school,

R.C. Sproul explained God’s plural name—Elohim.

He said God’s nature is plurality in unity, which gives meaning/purpose to all the plurality/diversity of this world.

Otherwise, what is the point of all the individual phenomena in our world?

Men/snowflakes/ipods/insects/galaxies/skateboards, all of which break down, wear out, or get sold at garage sales, and ultimately end up in the universal dump?

Were it not that everything in creation exists according to God’s purpose, it would all be meaningless chaos, that comes/goes and is forgotten, making life itself utterly meaningless.

Fathers of the faith live in the awareness of that

unity-of-purpose running through all created things, and consummated in the incarnation of God—Jesus.

For a father of the faith, God Himself is the central integrating principle of his entire life-style.

Adam communed with his Creator in the Garden of Eden.

His whole life revolved around that daily conversation with God in the cool of the day.

But when he was cast out of the Garden, and cut off from fellowship w/ God, his life became almost meaningless—just a matter of surviving by the sweat of his brow.

Fathers of the faith seek to recapture what Adam lost, through ongoing communion with God, by virtue of ongoing communion with X.

And in doing so, they experience God’s love, just as Jesus prayed to the

Father in Jn 17:26=> *“I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known; that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them.”*

Now that gives life real meaning!

That recaptures what Adam lost, and more.

John himself was a father of the faith, having for many years meditated on God's majesty/magnificence, His greatness/goodness.

He had come to understand that all of history is a playing-out of God's supreme will, and that all things exist in-Him, by-Him, and for-Him.

To know Him is the ultimate privilege/fulfillment of human life.

In these simple words then, John sums it all up for every father-of- the-faith who has come into a mature relationship with God—“*You know Him who has been from the beginning.*”

Young Men

[Verse 13b]=> “*I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.*”

In one sense, young men are in the prime of their lives.

Every nation looks to its strong young men for its national defense.

Whereas fathers of the faith are prone to contemplation, the young men (and women) of the faith are fighters.

They contend for the faith, & they extend the Kingdom, through their evangelistic conquests.

This is their role, & the Lord enables them to do it.

These are no longer biblical milk-drinkers only, but meat-eaters as well.

While they were still children of the faith, they may have been timid about defending it; but no longer.

Now they know what they believe, and they really believe it—the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints—and they'll do battle to defend it, “*strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might*” (Eph 6:10).

Young men overcome the evil one because they have to=> the evil one is always attacking them, knowing the threat they pose to his power.

To resist him successfully, they must put-on the whole armor of God, keep-it-on, and get-comfortable wearing it at all times.

But even with all their armor, they still know they are only=> “*strong in the Lord & in the strength of His might*” (not their own).

They overcome the devil by simply resisting his temptations.

They were once his slaves, but when they declared Jesus to be their Master, they began to resist the evil one.

As they obey X's will, they defeat the devil's purposes, and he has no defense for that.

Jms 4:7—“**Submit** therefore to God. **Resist** the devil & he will flee from you” (to resist him, is to defeat him).

Their simply remaining pure from sin, defeats the evil one.

But young men of the faith also overcome Satan by opposing him in his war against the Kingdom of God.

They proclaim the gospel to the lost, in some cases snatching them out of Satan's grasp, & hell's fire.

The Church needs all the young men/women of the faith it can muster, so it needs to help its children grow into young men.

*** Stanza 2**

Children (again)

[Verse 13c]=> *"I have written to you, **children**, because you know the Father."*

John uses a different word for "children" from the one in verse 12.

Both are diminutive terms of endearment, but while the word in verse 12 emphasizes kinship, this word emphasizes subordination.

Spiritual children need parent-like instruction in the Word, to which they can submit, because they are ignorant, immature, weak, and vulnerable to the false teaching of religious deceivers.

Eph 4:14-15=> *"We are no longer to be **children**, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; / but speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up** in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ."*

Children are wonderful in their exuberance/teachability.

And it's delightful to watch spiritual children discover the security/peace/joy/love that is theirs, in X Jesus.

As Paul points out, they have come to *"know the Father"* as their beloved *"Abba Father"* (Rom 8:15), & that loving relationship has saved their souls.

But spiritual childhood is not something to be perpetuated.

It holds all the promise of the future, but that promise will only be realized as they *"grow up"* into X, the Head, becoming young men/women of the faith.

As II Pet 3:18 commands=> *"**Grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

We celebrate the potential of spiritual childhood.

But that's just a starting point.

The real joy comes as children grow into young manhood, and then young-men develop into spiritual fathers of the faith, as their minds are renewed in God's Word by God's Spirit.

This is the significance of the Xn life that we celebrate.

This is how Jesus X is glorified in our lives.

2 Cor 3:18=> *“We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.”*

Fathers (again)

[Verse 14a]=> *“I have written to you, **fathers**, because you know Him who has been from the beginning.”*

This is word-for-word the exact same statement (even in Gk) that John made about fathers back in verse 13.

Why the repetition? 1st, for emphasis; 2nd, because this intimate knowing of Creator-God has become all that really matters to these people, and John uses repetition to stress that point.

They enjoyed the strength/virility of their young-manhood at one time, ransacking Satan’s fortresses by wielding God’s weapons of war w/ youthful vigor/zeal/agility.

But now that joy has been eclipsed by this far greater joy of feasting on the wonders of God’s own majesty/glory.

They can say what Jesus said to His disciples (Jn 4:32)=>\ *“I have food to eat that you do not know about.”*

I would ask each of you (both men/women) to judge yourself, as to whether you might be 1 of the “fathers” of the Church.

If not, is your life moving in that direction?

- * Are you mature in the faith, sure of what you believe because you have carefully thought through the Bible’s teachings and have developed strong biblical convictions.
- * Have you done your service as a young warrior, defending the faith, & gaining victory over Satan’s temptations?
- * Would others look to your spiritual stability/strength for help, if the church were under attack from false teachers?
Would they ask you to pray for them?

One of my sons said recently that the thing he misses most about his grandmother since she died, was the fact that he always knew she was praying for him.

- * Are you among those described by Heb 5:14, *“who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good & evil?”*
- * Are you a spiritual provider/care-giver for others, who fulfills in the church, a father’s role, as the protector/provider for the home?
- * Do you have a tender concern for the church’s spiritual children?
- * Have you brought sinners to new life in X?

Technically, a father really isn’t a father until he has children, is he?

In I Cor 4:15, Paul wrote=> *“If you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.”*

The Church doesn't have many fathers/mothers of the faith.

But the ones it has are the Church's strength, its backbone, and one of its most precious assets.

Young Men (again)

[Verse 14b] (John)=> *“I have written to you, **young men**, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”*

Before a person can be a father, he must become a young man/woman of the faith.

“Young men” are spiritually strong because God's Word remains in them, enabling them to overcome Satan.

They're strong doctrinally, no longer carried about by every wind of doctrinal error.

They are equipped thru their understanding of Scripture to defeat deception, to refute error, & to guard the Truth.

But they're also strong morally, thru their obedience to the Word mindful of Psa

119:9=> *“How can a **young man** keep his way **pure**? By keeping it according to Thy **word**.”*

A spiritual “young man's” strength is seen in many ways.

* He overcomes the evil one by resisting his attack.

He keeps the shield of faith with him at all times, so he can extinguish the evil one's flaming missiles (Eph 6:16).

* He attacks the enemy of souls with the *“sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (Eph 6:17), eager to take the battle into the enemy's own territory, & zealous for the Lord/His-chosen-ones.

* He is strong to endure, when he suffers the trials of life.

He considers it all joy when he encounters them, knowing that such testing will give him endurance (Jms 1:2).

He endures the daily/tedious grind of life's responsibilities w/o complaining, having learned to be content in any/every situation (Phil 4:11).

When he is reviled for his faith, he (like his Savior) reviles not in return, having taken up his cross & followed X, knowing where that leads.

He is the admiration of those who are still children, and an inspiration for their faith to follow.

Regardless of whether you're a child/young-man/father, being a Xn makes your life significant/worthy-of-celebration.

As Augustus Toplady wrote in one of his hymns=>

How vast the benefits divine
Which we in Christ possess!

We are redeemed from guilt and shame
And called to holiness.

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Text: 1 John 2:12-14

1. In today’s text we come to a [10 poem] of celebration.
Ex 15:1-2; I Sam 2:1; Lk 1:46-48; I Jn 1:6-7; 5:13
2. John’s poem consists of two stanzas with three lines in each stanza; each line is addressed to Christians at a certain level of [20 maturity].
Phil 1:6
3. Not only does our own personal growth reassure us that we have the life of God working within us, it also shows us what we have to look [16 forward] to.

*** Stanza 1**

Little children

[1 John 2:12]

4. Spiritual children haven’t been Christians long enough to fully understand all the doctrinal issues, but they know that their sins have been forgiven, and they [16 rejoice] in that.
Lk 18:13; II Sam 12:13
5. These spiritual newborns may not have a well developed theology, but they know their sins are forgiven “*for His [14 name’s] sake.*”
6. The heart of a newly-saved child of God glows with gratitude, knowing that his sins are [18 forgiven].
Mk 8:36-37

Fathers

[Verse 13a]

I Jn 2:3; Phil 3:10

7. Through their knowledge of Christ, spiritual fathers have come to know God, and they have become [16 fixated] on His character, the depths of His glory, and His mighty deeds.
Psa 63:6-8; 42:8; 102:25-27

8. For a father of the faith, God Himself is the central integrating principle of his entire [10 life] style.

Jn 17:26

Young Men

[Verse 13b]

9. Whereas fathers of the faith are prone to contemplation, young men (and women) of the faith are fighters; they contend for the faith and they [14 extend] the Kingdom.

Eph 6:10

10. They overcome the devil by simply resisting his temptations, but young men of the faith also proclaim the [14 gospel] to the lost.

Jms 4:7

*** Stanza 2**

Children

[Verse 13c]

Eph 4:14-15; Rom 8:15; II Pet 3:18

11. We celebrate the potential of spiritual childhood, but that's just as starting point; the real joy comes as children [10 grow] into young manhood.

II Cor 3:18

Fathers

[Verse 14a]

12. Fathers enjoyed the strength and virility of their young-manhood; but now that joy has been eclipsed by feasting on the wonders of [12 God's] own majesty and glory.

Jn 4:32; Heb 5:14; I Cor 4:15

Young Men

[Verse 14b]

13. "Young men" are equipped through their understanding of Scripture to defeat deception, to [14 refute] error & to guard the Truth.

Psa 119:9; Eph 6:17; Jms 1:2; Phil 4:11

14. Regardless of whether you are a “child”, a “young-man,” or a “father,” being Christian makes your life significant and [14 worthy] of celebration.