

1 John 2:12-17

Introduction

I was pleased to read this week that a new series of *'Who Do You Think You Are?'* will be starting next month. For those who haven't seen it, it's a TV programme in which various celebrities trace their family trees to uncover details of their ancestry. They search back in time to discover the stories of their great, great, great, great -and so on - grandparents, sometimes with unexpected results.

For some it's just a bit of fun. But for others it profoundly affects their sense of identity. It makes for surprisingly enjoyable viewing.

'Who am I?' is a question we all ask at some time or another.

And it's a question that we, as Christians, can answer with confidence.

That's how our passage begins this morning. John starts with words of affirmation. He wants us to be confident in who we are.

So that's our first heading: Know who you are.

Know who you are

Please look down with me at verses 12 to 14.

**I am writing to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.**

**I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.**

**I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.**

**I write to you, dear children,
because you know the Father.**

**I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.**

**I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God lives in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.**

John wants *us*, his readers, to be assured of our identity as members of God's family.

These are highly stylised verses, but we shouldn't let that trip us up.

John's writing these things to all believers who make up the local church.

Throughout this letter he repeatedly addresses all his readers as dear children. So, what he writes here is addressed to all of us. We are all dear children of our Father in heaven.

And John assumes that we fall into two groups. There are those who are fathers. And those who are young men. Some see here a reference to different levels of spiritual maturity. But it's more likely that John's simply referring to age. There are those who are of an older age. And there are those of a younger age. He's writing to all of us, no matter how old we are.

And we shouldn't be too concerned about the masculine terminology. That merely reflects a first-century way of speaking and by no means excludes older women and younger women.

John's writing these things to all of us in the church. It doesn't matter whether you're old or young, male or female, a new believer or a seasoned follower of Jesus, John is writing to you.

He wants each of us to be assured of our identity. These aren't the cheesy slogans we find on fridge magnets. These are truths of the gospel.

And John begins with forgiveness.

...your sins have been forgiven on account of his name, he says.

Here's a truth to make your heart sing.

Whatever you've done or said. Whatever you've failed to do or say. Whatever shame you feel. Whatever burden of guilt you're carrying around. You can let it go. It's forgiven...

...on account of his name, John says. In other words, because of Jesus.

If you belong to Jesus by faith, then your sin is dealt with. He has carried all your guilt and shame to the cross and paid the penalty in your place so that you'll never have to. In verse 2, John said that Jesus is **the atoning sacrifice for our sins**. He has borne the full extent of the Father's wrath at your sin. It's all been poured out on him, to the very last drop, like a bottle of water being poured onto the ground. And on account of him, God the Father delights to declare you forgiven.

Let that truth sink in. This is who you are. You're one whose sins have been fully and finally forgiven on account of Jesus.

And, in verse 13, John makes two further statements.

...you know him who is from the beginning, he says.

He's talking about Jesus. To put your faith in Jesus is not merely to sign up to a statement of belief about him. Or to recite a creed (as we'll be doing later in the service). Or even to know that he has won your forgiveness and to celebrate that wonderful truth. It's more than that. It's to enter a personal and ongoing relationship with him.

It's to walk with him each day.

Again, this is who you are. No matter where you are or what you're doing, whether you're going through good times or bad times, you live each day in personal relationship with the risen Lord Jesus as your King and your Saviour.

And that means, verse 13: **...you have overcome the evil one.**

To belong to Jesus is to be freed from the grasp of the devil. If you belong to Jesus, then the devil no longer has any power over you. The devil's power is sin. But your sin has been forgiven. Of course, he can still trouble you. He's still the old snake, who can sink his fangs into you. But his venom is no longer lethal. He cannot kill you. He no longer controls your eternal destiny... because you belong to another.

You belong to Jesus.

And that means belonging to the Father... verse 14.

I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father.

To know Jesus is to know the Father. To say that our sins are forgiven on account of Jesus is to say that every barrier to personal relationship with God the Father has been removed.

When you and I put our faith in Jesus, God the Father welcomed us into his family with open arms. John has already pointed us to the evidence of that fact: it's that we walk in his light, obey his commands, and love our fellow believers as brothers and sisters.

And to belong to God's family means to have a part in the glorious future he has in store for his people, when he renews all things. It's to have an eternal inheritance in heaven. That's the certain hope we have as his people.

And it all comes through hearing and believing the gospel.

Look at the *end* of verse 14.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

When we live each day by God's word, trusting his promises and obeying his commands, we are strong and secure.

Through his word, the Bible, God leads us and guides us and protects us from the lies of the devil. With his word living in us, we are fully equipped for life.

This is why it's so important that we read his word and pay attention to what he says to us in it.

John wants us to know who we are: we're children of God, whose sins have been forgiven, who live each day in personal relationship with God the Father and God the Son, who have overcome the devil, who have all we need for life in God's word, the Bible.

These are truths that John wants to rub into our hearts. They're truths for us to rejoice in.

They're truths for us to remember and not forget.

John wants us to know who we are.

And he also wants us to know who we're not: we're no longer children of the world.

So that's our second heading: Know who you're not.

Know who you're not

Please look down again at verses 15 to 17.

John writes: **Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives for ever.**

The world, here, is not the physical creation. We're to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of the planet we live on.

The world is the whole of humanity in opposition to God.

At the end of his letter, in chapter 5 verse 19, John says: **We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.**

The world, then, is humanity under the rule of Satan, with desires, values and points of view that are totally opposed to God.

As Christians, we live in the world, but we no longer belong to the world. Through Jesus, we have overcome the evil one. We have been chosen out of the world to belong to God as his children.

So, when John tells us not to love the world, he's telling us not to go back to living as we used to live before Christ called us.

He doesn't mean that we're to show no concern for those around us. Elsewhere, the Bible tells us to seek the good of those around us, supremely by pointing them to Jesus.

But what we're not to do is to share their attitudes and values. We're not to be conformed to the desires and points of view of the world around us.

Our lifestyle and values are not to be shaped by what people say at the school gate, or by what we read about on social media, or what we watch on TV or listen to on the radio.

And John gives us two reasons.

Firstly, if we love the world we show that we have no love for the Father.

Verse 15: If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world.

Worldliness is an attitude of the heart that is wholly opposed to God. John twice describes it as lust and then also as pride. Those are heart attitudes.

He describes it as **the lust of the flesh**. If you want to remember what the flesh is, knock the letter 'h' off the end and read it backwards. It's 'self'. It's not simply our physical lusts, although it includes them. The flesh is the totality of our self-indulgent desires and appetites. It's the old sinful nature that we were born with, that craves comfort and pleasure. To follow the lust of the flesh is to be ruled by our selfishness rather than by God's indwelling word. It's to put 'me' first before God and others. But that's not who we are. We are no longer ruled by the flesh. In Christ, we have been given a new nature. We have received a new love for God as your heavenly Father and a new desire to serve him. And that means living a whole new way. Not selfishly but selflessly. Not indulging the flesh but seeking each day to deny it. That's the life we've all been called to as followers of Jesus.

And John describes worldliness as **the lust of the eyes**. We see it, we want it. It's materialism and greed. Advertising agencies know all too well that our eyes are the doorway to our heart. That's why so much money is spent on TV commercials and ads on social media. To follow the lust of the eyes is to live for what can be seen and touched, here and now. But that's not who we are. To know God is to live not for the pleasures of this world but for the glories of the world to come. It's to store up for yourself treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth. It's to live by faith rather than by sight.

And finally, John describes worldliness as **the pride of life**. It's the boastful, self-exalting pride that's based on our expensive possessions, or our important status, or our trendy image. It's wanting to big ourselves up while putting others down. It's to exalt ourselves as gods rather than to acknowledge our utter dependence on the one true God.

... **the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.** None of this comes from the Father, John says. It all comes from a world that's under the control of the evil one. And we're not of the world! We lived that way once but not anymore.

So, John says: **If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.**

Worldliness is an attitude of the heart that is wholly opposed to God.

It will steal away our love for God.

If worldliness creeps into our hearts, we will soon now it, because it will rob us of our joy in him.

If you lack joy in the Christian life, examine your heart, and see where worldliness has taken hold of you.

Love for the world and love for the Father are diametrically opposed. We cannot love both the world and the Father.

That's the first reason that we're not to be conformed to the values of the world around us.

But John gives us a second reason not to love the world. And that's because the world is passing away.

Verse 17.

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives for ever.

This world is the object of God's saving love. The Father sent his Son into the world to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. **And not only for ours**, John says in verse 2, **but also for the sins of the whole world.** There is salvation for all who come to Christ in repentance and faith. No one is excluded. But outside of Christ there can be only judgement for a world that's under the control of the devil.

The world is not only opposed *to* God. It is opposed *by* God. The world is at war with God. And, in the end, God wins.

Humanity, in its opposition to God, is doomed. This rebellious world has no future. It's under the control of the devil and must be destroyed. A time will come when it will have passed away along with the sinful desires that define it. When that time comes, all who remain will be those who do the will of God, John says.

If we live for what's passing away, we condemn ourselves to be identified with its ultimate demise. But if we do the will of God, which is to believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another, then we will live for ever.

John wants us to set our hearts on what is godly and eternal not on what is worldly and passing.

Conclusion

We need to know who we are.

Once we belonged to the world. We too were under the control of the devil and destined for destruction. But no longer. God has chosen us out of the world to belong to him. In Christ, he has forgiven our sin, made us members of his family, and promises us a glorious future. Our allegiance no longer lies with the world but with him.

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: Is the guiding principle for my life still to do and get what I want, or is it now to obey and serve my heavenly Father?

Let's pray.

Loving heavenly Father, in Christ you have forgiven our sins, welcomed us as members of your family, and given us all we need for life through your word, the Bible. How could we ever thank you enough? Please help us to live as your children should, loving you and not the world, and living to serve you rather than ourselves. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.