

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on 1 John 3:1-2 on June 7, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Invisible Suitcases**  
**Today's Focus: "I Am Worthless"**

**"I Am A Dearly Loved Child of God!"**

In the name of Jesus Christ who once said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Friends, have you ever been to the airport and seen someone loaded down with luggage? We didn't go on a lot of family vacations when I was a kid, but I do remember flying down to visit my grandparents in El Paso, Texas when I was about 6 and my sister was 3. I can still see my dad trying to carry all our luggage through the airport pretty much all by himself. I mean for our family of 4 we had at least 4 suitcases, a huge old BETA camcorder in its own bulky case (that thing was like a boat anchor). We had carry-ons or backpacks for each of us, plus a giant empty suitcase because of course you needed something to bring back the inevitable souvenirs. So the result was that we'd come back more loaded down than we left!

And so I have this vivid memory of my dad trying to stuff all this stuff into our suitcases and then trying to carry all this stuff through the airport. And of course our suitcases then didn't have wheels. And I don't ever remember my dad trying to rent one of those luggage carts. I'm guessing he thought, "I don't need that. I'm not going to spend money on that. I can handle it." You ever seen someone awkwardly carrying their luggage like that when it's so painfully obvious?

But, friends, what about when it's not so obvious? You see today we're starting a new series that I've called Invisible Suitcases. It's about all the kinds of emotional baggage that kids, teens and adults accumulate and then carry with them through life. There are so many people who are dealing with broken families, broken marriages, abusive relationships. They're struggling with feelings of being unloved, of low self-esteem, of powerlessness and hopelessness. They're searching for happiness but finding only that what the world promised would make them happy only ends up hurting them even more. Their invisible suitcases accumulate just going through life. And as they carry these invisible suitcases it causes them to stuff their feelings inside or sometimes to explode and hurt others.

Now maybe you're sitting there today and you're thinking, "Well, Pastor Ben, that's not me. I'm not lugging around any emotional baggage. I've got no invisible suitcases. I'm fine. I'm ok." But let me ask you...are you really? You see for too long, too many people have thought of church as a place where you're supposed to make it look like you're ok even when you know you're not. Struggling with depression? Be sure not to let anyone to know about it. Battling addiction? Don't want to put that one into a prayer request. Have a fight on the way to church in the morning? Be sure and wear your biggest smile walking past the greeters so no one gets suspicious. Having struggles with your faith? Definitely don't talk to anyone about it. Avoid the announcements that encourage you to join a small group.

Well friends, it's my prayer as we start this series that one of the results of it will be that we'll be able to be honest and open first of all with ourselves about the emotional baggage we are carrying. But then also I pray that as we do this, we will become more understanding of each other in our church family—more

patient, more tolerant, more forgiving, more kind, and more open with each other so that we can ultimately also be aware of the needs of others around us. Then we can become the kind of place where people who don't know Jesus Christ can really, truly feel safe and so want to learn about their Savior who carried it all to the cross in our place because he loves us so much.

People all around us whether they're from the city or the suburbs are carrying invisible suitcases and they don't know what to do with them. The solutions that the world offers are at best only coping strategies. All the while the devil keeps pouring on lies. The first of these that we're going to talk about today is the lie where he gets you to think, "I am worthless."

You ever tell yourself that? Maybe you started feeling this way after someone did something horribly wrong to you and you can't help but think it's somehow all your fault or you deserve what happened to you. Or perhaps you feel like you're just a failure as if you can't do anything right. Maybe you failed to live up to your own standards. You studied really hard but didn't get the grade. You made a promise but you broke it. You said you weren't going to do that thing again but you did. Or maybe you failed to live up to the standards that somebody else set for you—your boss's measure of success, your parents' standard of performance, your boyfriend or girlfriend's standard of beauty, your spouse's unrelentingly harsh demands. Or maybe even you are keenly aware how far short of God's holy standards you've fallen and no matter how you try and deal with your guilt and shame you can't escape that little voice that lies to you and says, "Because you are such a big failure, your life has little value. You are garbage. You are worthless." And so what happens is that over time you start to believe this lie. It becomes an invisible suitcase you carry around. You might end up hurting other people and you don't even know why. You pull back from those who want to show you love and they don't even know why. All because you've been clinging to a lie that makes you think, "I am worthless."

Now for those of you who think, "I don't get it how anyone could possibly think that or feel that way. I don't understand people with depression. They ought to just suck it up and tough it out like me."... I would just like to ask you a pointed question. If you've never thought, "I am worthless," then just what is it that gives you a sense of worth? What is it? Is it your athletic ability or good health? Is it your musical skills? Is it your good grades on your semester exams or your report card? Is it your successful career? Is it a steady relationship? Is it your ability to pay down the mortgage? Is it the approval of your peers or your popularity around the office? Is it your sense of beauty when you look in the mirror, the number of likes you get on your selfies where posing for the camera, your six pack abs, how much you can bench, or how much work you can get done compared to others? Because if your sense of worth is tied up in any of these kinds of things so that you think, "I don't have any invisible suitcases. I'm doing just fine" then what could happen to you in life is this. Because he loves you so much, God might allow you to be stripped of these things which you think give your life value apart from him. A career ending injury, a financial setback, a car accident, a loss will bring you to your knees. And then what?

You see if your sense of worth is tied up in anything, any good thing or person even apart from God, then whatever that thing is has become your idol. And if you worship God only in so far as he gives you what you want, your idols, then what's going to happen when he takes your idols away from you is that you will be devastated. You will be tempted to think, "God must not love me. Why else have I lost what I want? I must be worthless." And friends, that final lie would be even worse than the first.

But here are the words of God that we're going to look at today which are always true. They are words that annihilate the devil's lie. They are words to help shift your thoughts from "I am worthless" to "I am precious for I am a dearly loved child of God."

The apostle John writes: *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*<sup>2</sup> *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

*See*, he says. See what? *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!* In other words, other people might call you a failure. You might call yourself a failure. The devil might call you worthless. But God? God is not like other people. He is not even like your earthly parents whether they were great parents or bad ones. God is your true Heavenly Father and he calls you, "My dear child." This is after all what he said of his own beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Remember when Jesus was baptized at the beginning of his public ministry? When Jesus was baptized the Father spoke from heaven above so all below could hear, "This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased." (cf. Matthew 3:17)

And you know why he was well pleased? Because everything that Jesus did while here on earth in human form he did without a single failure. Jesus never failed to live up to his Father's standards. He never sinned. He never broke a promise. He never compromised his integrity. He never caved to peer pressure just to be popular. Never succumbed to lust or greed or narcissism. Never ruined someone else's reputation so that he could feel better about himself. Never betrayed a confidence in order to gain a few new friends. Never sought revenge or even thought to hurt other people back. Unlike you and me, Jesus was perfect in his unbroken obedience to God and this all the way through to the cross where he died for every sin, every imperfection, and every failure of all humanity from the beginning of time right on through today. He never felt the shame of moral failure yet took upon himself all of ours, all our baggage, all our invisible suitcases, all our sins and paid for it all so that when Jesus was raised from the dead on Easter it was God the Father's way of affirming, "This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased."

Now friends, here's the incredible truth that annihilates the devil's big lie. What God the Father says of his own Son, Jesus, is what he also says about you and me who are clothed with Christ's perfect record of obedience through baptism! This is the incredible comfort of our own baptism which brings the blessings of Christ's perfection to people like us. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says. And remember here's a guy in Paul who once thought he was somebody important because of his religious performance but then found out that it was all worthless along with all attempts to feel good about yourself apart from the grace of God. He then felt guilty and ashamed and broken and until he got up and was baptized and his sins were washed away by God who chose him to be his own and loved him in spite of him. And here's what Paul says,<sup>26</sup> *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,*<sup>27</sup> *for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ* (Galatians 3:26-27).

So friends, who are you? You are dearly loved children of God by virtue of your baptism into Christ. *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.* Of course the world thinks this is

ridiculous. The world scoffs at baptism—how can water do such great things? The world despises the very idea that a person’s sense of worth or value can be found in something other than the approval of society instead of the approval of the Almighty. But so be it. Why would we expect the world to love us who are called the children of God when the world first hated and murdered the very Son of God?

But God’s Word yet gives us a comfort and approval that cannot be taken away from us. A shield that no enemy’s arrow can penetrate. A firewall that no spiritual hacker can breach. For this is what I know. No matter how I feel at a given moment, here’s the fact that’s truly true: I am a dearly loved child of God for I am baptized. Therefore I don’t need the world’s approval but I have something even better—my dear Heavenly Father’s. I don’t need to somehow to gain my Father’s approval for in Christ I already have it. I don’t need to earn forgiveness for in Christ I have already received it. Who I am right now is a dearly loved child of God and what this will mean one day in heaven is that I will receive an inheritance that is such a treasure I’m not yet fully equipped to even comprehend it.”

Friends, imagine that you got to go on vacation for 2 weeks to an exotic place. Think of your dream vacation! And while you’re gone, imagine that you got me to watch your house for you. And when you got home I said, “Hey, I want you to know that while you were gone a bill came in the mail and I paid it.” Ok now how are you going to feel about that? Probably pretty thankful. But how would you express your thanks? Well, you wouldn’t really know how to express your thankfulness for the gift unless you knew how much it cost the giver, right? You’re going to ask, “Well what bill did you pay?” And if I said, “Oh it was the internet bill” well then you might be thankful enough but that’s just a \$50 monthly bill. Yet what if when you asked, “What bill did you pay?” I said, “Actually the bill that I paid in full was for your missed mortgage payments for the last decade and your back taxes that totaled over \$100,000 which was about to result in the foreclosure of your home.” Now would you perhaps feel a little bit differently? A little more thankful?

Well friends, you and I will never know how much we have to thank God for, how much we’re really worth, until we understand the price God paid for us. If you want to know how valuable you are to God, look at the price he paid to take care of your sin. *“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18-19).*

You are not worthless, you are precious. You are a dearly loved child of God bought with the precious blood of Christ. Therefore guard yourself with this amazing truth of God’s Word. This week try committing 1 John 3:1 to memory by reading it, repeating it out loud, and actively recalling it when you wake up each day. This will help you to begin guarding yourself against the lies of the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature. You are not worthless, you are a dearly loved child of God! Embracing this fact will also help us as a church family embrace other people with whatever baggage they bring when we realize that we can all be honest about the invisible suitcases that we carry together with the support of Christ.

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! Amen.*