

Our Greatest Moment: We Shall See Him

1 John 2:28-3:3

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What a week it has been. The bombing at the Boston Marathon and the explosion at the Texas plant have dominated the headlines and our thoughts as fellow Americans. One an apparent act of terror and the other an apparent industrial accident. In both cases, huge explosions, loss of life, national fear and sorrow. Our president urging us to keep running and to finish our race. Before preparing this sermon, I watched the manhunt for the second suspect in Boston. Besides the Marathon bombing, the terrorist shot and killed a police officer and ran over his own brother in his escape. He was caught Friday night.

What can we say about all this? In the story of humanity, it's the same story just a different chapter. Hate. Murder. Chaos. Death. While our hearts break for the victims of all this mayhem, mankind continues on its ongoing tragedy. We were made in the image of God. We were made for glory and purity and love and worship of our Creator. We were made to be and experience so much more goodness and beauty than this sinful world and our sinful selves can deliver. We live in this little, finite, painful moment in time. The Bible gives the grand over-sweeping story of God who creates, man who corrupts, Jesus who comes to die for sins and to save sinners, and a future second coming to consummate history and judge the world.

What feels like chaos to us in a week like this is another chapter of this massive story of God, sin, salvation, and eternity future.

What awaits us? What is coming for Christians? And what difference should that make in who we are and how we live today? Our passage is 1 John 2:28-3:3. We already saw this passage's wonderful statement about our status as adopted sons and daughters. It holds another breathtaking promise.

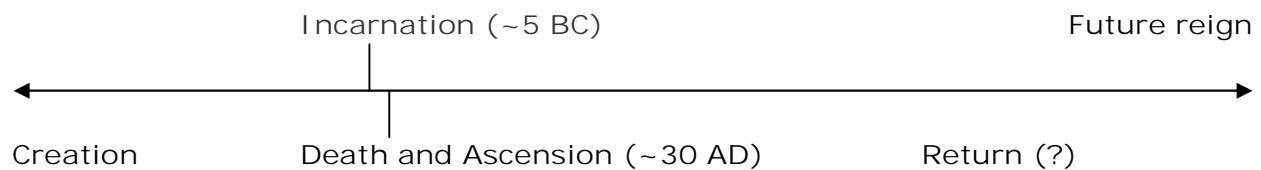
And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 2:28-3:3 ESV)

John is writing to a church reeling from false teaching and those who followed it. They left the church and they left the gospel. Verse 2:18ff describes their failure to "abide." John urges his flock to abide, to remain true to Jesus and the true gospel. In these verses, John provides a very strong motivation for us to not give up and to not walk away: In 2:28 he says, "When he appears." Then again in 3:2 he says again, "When he appears."

The Second Coming of Jesus

What is this describing? Who is the "he" and what is the appearance? John is describing what is often called the second coming of Christ or the return of Christ. This is a dominant

theme of the New Testament. It is mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament. It is mentioned in every book with more than one chapter except Galatians.¹



This return is referred to as:

- The Day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:8)
- His coming in the clouds (Matthew 24:30)
- His coming in his glory (Matthew 25:31)
- Unexpected, like lightning (Matthew 24:27; Luke 12:40)
- The blessed hope and glorious appearing of Jesus (Titus 2:12-13)

These and many other references including a vivid description in Revelation 19 put before us the certainty of Jesus returning. 1 Jn. 3:3 calls it our "hope." Our confident expectation. The whole Bible ends with these words, Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20)

Remember that John is writing to urge his people to "abide" in the one true gospel. To all the other things he's said, he adds this one, abiding in Christ means confidence when Christ returns. This is contrasted with those who will "shrink from him in shame at his coming." (2:28) It's not hard to think of whom he is describing. Those who left. Those who didn't persevere. Those who did not remain true to Christ and the true gospel. For them, Christ's return will be a moment of terror and shame.

I want to focus on 1 John 3:2-3. Here are promises meant to encourage and uplift and sustain and I hope they do that today. Let me read it again: Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

By virtue of God's adoption love to all who believe in his Son, we are already children of God. That is an astonishing truth. We saw this last time. If God would have just forgiven our sins and restored a creator/creature relationship, that would have been infinitely more than we deserved. If we merely had the same status as angels, that would give us cause for eternal praise. But God takes it even further. We are presently adopted children of God. Verse 2 says that what we will be is still to come. The best is yet to come.

It's like those TV commercials, "But wait! There's more!" What we will be has not yet appeared. The full extent and effect of our salvation is not yet seen. There is much, much more awaiting us than we have begun to see and realize. Like what, John? What's coming?

We know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Let's take this slow. When he appears? Second coming. We shall see Him. Christ. What is the fruit of that sight? We shall become like him.

¹ James Boice, *1 John*, p. 78.

We shall see him as he is – The beatific vision

Theologians call this “the beatific vision.” We will call it the greatest moment of our lives—to see Christ “as he is;” not as he was. Not in the weakness of his earthly ministry. Not in the weakness of his sufferings and crucifixion. Certainly not in the weakness of his death. We will not see his glory cloaked as it was during his earthly ministry when God walked among us but looked like any average Joe. Thousands “saw” him with their own eyes and they were not changed by that vision. Jesus’ glory was cloaked. It was stealth glory. Off the radar. His true identity was hidden. The demons knew who he was and cried out, I know who you are—the Holy One of God! (Mark 1:24). Everyone else missed it. Certainly the Pharisees did. The crowds got glimpses through his miracles. His disciples came the closest to seeing it during what is called Jesus’ transfiguration:

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (Matthew 17:1-2)

For a few moments, Jesus uncloaked his true glory. It emanated from him like the sun shining in its full strength. No movie effect can come close because that light is not simply light, it is holiness and power and divine authority. The glorious Son of God. The effect on the disciples was terror at the sight of him.

His glory remained cloaked until he ascended to heaven. What is he like now? The Apostle John saw him and described him this way:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. (Revelation 1:12-16)

This Jesus. This fully glorious Son of God. It is he who is returning and when he does, we shall see him “as he is.” With our eyes. He will be visible; physical. He will return. We will see him as he is. All he is. All his glory. Some will shrink in fear. But if we abide, if we remain true, we can and will have confidence in that moment for he is our Savior, Lord. That sight will do something to us.

We will be changed/transformed/transfigured

But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

I think most often people talk about heaven and the new earth in entirely the wrong categories. There is speculation of when Jesus will return or whether I’ll be short in heaven or whether we will play golf on the new earth...actually, that is a good question.

The really important questions have to do with personhood. Not what will it be like, but what will we be like? Jesus came to restore fully what sin broke. Sin broke our image bearing. Sin broke our wholeness as humans and sin broke the fullness of relationship with our Creator.

The cross established a new way, a new covenant, and a new life available by faith in Jesus. It was victory over sin and forgiveness for all who believe. If we are a Christian today, we have experienced new life in Christ; we have eternal life now. Our consciences are cleansed. And we are different people as the Spirit of God changes us, through progressive sanctification, more and more into the likeness of Christ. This is a blessing and we rejoice to see it in our lives and in the lives of others.

But wait, there's more! The best is yet to come. When he appears we shall be like him. What does that mean?

It means this. For now, our sanctification is progressive; slowly transformational. We rejoice to see progress against sin and temptation. We love God and neighbor more and more. But we also stumble and our sinful selves continue to wreak havoc in our inner lives and in our relationships with others. Should the Lord tarry, we will die works in progress, but incompletely so.

But when he appears, we shall be like him. At the second coming of Christ, he will appear in the full resplendence of his divine glory. His appearance will mean the instantaneous completion of our salvation and that begins with our body.

Our Future Body - Glorified

One massive part of salvation not yet revealed is what these bodies are going to be like. Jesus' resurrection proves that God wants to save our bodies too. Look at your body, there's a lot of work left to be done in that regard, amen? The bodies of Christians get old, wrinkly, and eventually die. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean you don't die. We bury too many of our brothers and sisters each year. Christians die. These bodies wear out.

But Christ will come and that moment will be our moment of bodily resurrection. Not to bodies like these, but to what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15 as glorified bodies; bodies similar to Jesus' body. Those old bodies, decayed and turned largely to dust, are going to be resurrected to eternal glory. The first sight our resurrected eyes will see is the glory of the coming King. For those who are alive when he returns, suddenly we see him and in that moment, our bodies are changed to glorified bodies, we will be like him.

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

The best theologian among us doesn't begin to realize how wonderful these glorified bodies will be. All we've known is these sinful ones. When he appears, you will be changed forever.

The Future Person – Purified

I think John's particular focus is not the physical but the ethical. The false teachers were abusing God's grace as license for sin. John says that the goal isn't sin, the goal is righteousness. Someday, that moral purity will be complete.

The power of sin was broken at salvation. That is regeneration—new birth and a new nature and a new heart. The power of sin was broken at salvation but the presence of sin remains. We know this well as an honest assessment of this past week for any of us shows. So what

about the presence of sin and the internal corruption of our hearts? When we see him, we will be like him. What is Jesus like? Absolute moral goodness. All the time. No sin. No selfishness. No internal conflict. No guilty conscience. When Jesus returns, and we see him, it will be instant full sanctification as the old is gone and the new is completely come. From that moment on and into eternity, We will be completely pure in every way, as Jesus is pure. No sin nature. No temptation. No guilty conscience. No besetting sin. None of that dirty feeling or just the sick ugliness of sin's effect on us.

We will be changed. Completely sanctified. Wholly pure. Just as Jesus is wholly pure.

Since we were born in sin that is a joy we cannot fathom because it's out of our experience. But someday, we will be changed.

There is great truth in verse 2. However, John's whole reason for writing it is what he says in v. 3: And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

If we desire to be pure in the future, we will desire it now

Here is why John makes these glorious statements. To make the hypocrisy of the false teachers clear. They wanted to say, "I am a child of God. Heaven's going to be awesome! Being with Jesus! Free from sin! Eternal life! It's going to be great!" Moral purity then. "Can't wait! But for now, I'm going to enjoy sin. I may even flaunt it." John says, why would you want to be like Jesus then if you have no desire to be like him now? This is spiritual schizophrenia. John says, "Do you realize who you are? Do you realize what you will be someday?" Those who do, don't want to live like children of the devil, they are children of God. Those who don't want sin then, don't want sin now. When Jesus comes, no true Christian says, "Bummer! Purity? Forever?" A true Christian desires purity now.

In a sense, we all get in eternity what we want now. Even in hell, God gives everything you want. If you don't want God here, he gives you a godless eternity. If you don't want righteousness now, he gives you unrighteousness for all eternity. If you don't want a holy life now, he gives you an unholy life for all eternity. But if you want purity now, God will give you total purity then.

It's only in eternity that anyone truly realizes how horrific sin is and how wonderful grace is. As J.C. Ryle said, "Hell is truth discovered too late."

Another way to know the true condition of our heart is not to listen to words. Talk is cheap. Look at your desires. Do you want holiness? When sin is there does it depress you? Or are sin and the world your real delight even as you hold your confession in your back pocket for the day when you need it?

What a great passage this is! If your real hope and satisfactions are in Christ, you'll want to be like him and what happens when Jesus comes will be the grandest moment of your life. If you want to be like the world and the devil, you won't care about sinning now and when Jesus comes you will shrink from him in shame. Our desires reveal our true condition. Sons of God or not. Daughters of God or not. The passage and this message are not guides to holiness or overcoming temptation. More time would be great for that. The point is if we desire purity in the future, we will want it now. We experience it imperfectly but the longing for it indicates the true presence of the Spirit. And can lead to assurance of salvation.

I'll end by quoting the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter:

My knowledge of that life is small
The eye of faith is dim
But it's enough that Christ knows all
And I shall be with him.

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