

“The Second Appearing of Jesus”
1 John 2:28-3:3
July 13, 2014

INTRODUCTION:

Today’s passage is about the second coming of Jesus, indicated by the twofold occurrence of the phrase **“when he appears.”** When the second coming of Jesus is brought up today, it is often done to satisfy curiosity or to sell a lot of books. Very often, authors will press the Bible to say more about Jesus’ return than it actually says. They will try to answer questions such as the timing of Jesus’ return or the nature of heaven. One author I read recently attempted (unconvincingly, I think) to answer the question of whether our pets will be in heaven with us. Such an attempt leads us into some unhealthy speculation. It is better to stick with what God has chosen to tell us, and be contented agnostics in what he has chosen not to reveal to us.

There is a provocative phrase in today’s passage about what will happen when Jesus returns. John says that **“what we will be has not yet appeared”** (3:2). John means that since God has chosen not to reveal certain things to us about our situation after Jesus’ return, there is a great deal that we just don’t know. But we can be confident that there is much more about the glories of heaven than what God tells us. Why has God chosen not to tell us about these things? Perhaps it’s because words can’t adequately convey them. Or maybe it’s that we lack the capacity to understand them or that they are so wonderful that they would prove a distraction to us now. I don’t know, and I don’t really need to know. What I do know from this passage is that there is more, and that when Jesus returns, it will have a profound effect upon all people. It will be profoundly satisfying to God’s people and profoundly traumatic to those who have not believed in him.

Why does John bring up this topic of the return of Jesus? Remember that he is writing to a congregation that has suffered a church split over a doctrinal issue. A group of people who denied that Jesus was the Christ had left the church. To this hurting church, John speaks words of hope. He reminds them of their solidarity with Jesus, a solidarity he urges them to experience as he tells them to “abide in Christ.” Part of this solidarity is that we share in the sufferings of Christ. As he was misunderstood and despised, so it will be for his followers. But this solidarity also means that his followers share in his bright future, a future that Jesus has already entered into. So John tells them that they will experience this solidarity with Jesus’ glory when Jesus’ glory is revealed at his return. John speaks of Jesus’ second coming here, answering the “what” question instead of the “when” question. Three things happen in the lives of Jesus’ followers as a result of his second coming. Two of these are in the future and the third in the present.

I. Confidence on Judgment Day

John offers a contrast between confidence and shrinking in shame. These are the two responses to the return of Christ. John is referring here to one of the first things that the Bible teaches will happen when Jesus returns. We speak of it in the Apostle's Creed when we say, "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead." The living are those who are alive at his return, and the dead those who have died prior to his return. Jesus taught this in Matthew 25:31-32. **"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."**

Before looking at the confidence promised God's children here, let's consider the alternative, described as **"shrinking from him in shame."** Shame is one of the most powerful of all human emotions. I remember reading years ago about one of the church fathers who was a young man during an era of the church when martyrdom was viewed as an exalted thing. This young man (I believe it was Origen), wanted to leave his house and declare himself for Christ and be martyred. His mother stopped him simply by hiding his clothes. He was willing to die for Christ, but unwilling to appear naked in public. Such is the power of shame. On the day of judgment, the shame will be so strong because the light of Jesus will allow no thought, word or deed to go undetected and unrevealed. In another place in the Bible, we read that on this day, even the powerful of the earth will flee to the caves and mountains, **"calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb'"** (Rev. 6:16).

But that is not the case with those John addresses as **"Little children."** They have been looked down on and despised just like Jesus, and have suffered through countless trials in their lives. But on that day of judgment, when Jesus will judge all men and women in perfect righteousness and justice, they are full of confidence. There is no fear, no fleeing in panic, only bold confidence. What is the origin of such confidence, and how can I know now whether I will respond in that day in confidence or fearful shame? This is such an important question because John is here describing the difference between those who abide in Jesus and have eternal life, and those who don't abide and don't have eternal life.

I believe we can know in advance whether we will respond in confidence or shame, because it is the same way we respond to God now. Is your tendency to run from God and from God's people now, because you are afraid of seeing

your sin exposed? Then it will be the same on that day, only worse. Or is your response more like those words in the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 52. The question asks, “What comfort is it to you that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead?” The answer: “In all my distress and persecution I turn my eyes to the heavens and confidently await as judge the very one who has already stood trial in my place before God and so has removed the whole curse from me.” In other words, the confidence displayed by God’s children is not borne of being sinless or focused on their greatness. Rather, it is focused on the greatness of our Lord Jesus, the sin-bearer. We can have confidence on judgment day because it is based outside of us, in the character and integrity of God himself, who says that the sacrifice offered by Jesus is adequate to cover our sins. We won’t have to ask the mountains to cover us, as the great ones in Revelation 6 asked, because the blood of Jesus covers us.

II. Participation in the Nature of our Elder Brother

I find the first two verses of chapter 3 to be some of the most exhilarating in the Bible. **“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.”** I think the best way to approach these verses is to take them as written and consider each part in order.

We are told to “see” or behold this love. Take a good long look at it. There are things we are not yet permitted to see about God and heaven, but here’s one that we are commanded to look at carefully. That phrase that is translated “what kind of” comes from a word that originally meant “of what country.” It is as if the love of God is “out of this world”. And this love has been given to us. We don’t acquire God’s love by making ourselves lovable, but simply receive it as we would a gift. The NIV translates this word as “lavished.” The love of God has been “lavished” upon us.

What does this love do for us? By it we are **“called children of God.”** It is often pointed out here that John says *children* of God, not *sons* of God. Is there a difference between a child and a son? According to Martin Lloyd-Jones, the difference is “that the word *son* emphasizes a legal, external relationship, whereas the word *child* always puts the emphasis upon the common nature, that the child is derived from the parent and shares the nature and the blood of the parent.” God makes us his children, not only by legal right, but by putting within us the nature of our elder brother, Jesus. That’s why he goes on to say what he says at the end of verse 1. We are treated as Jesus was because

we share his nature. Just as the world didn't know and appreciate his true identity, so we will be treated as well.

For emphasis, John adds, **“and so we are.”** We are not only called children of God, we are children of God. Note the present tense. He doesn't say that we will one day become children of God, but that we are such even now, even before our full transformation takes place. And then to emphasize the same thing again, he says it once more at the beginning of verse 2. **“Beloved, we are God's children now.”** If you have come to the place where you are trusting in Jesus alone for your salvation, you are just as much a child of God now as you will ever be. When sin is finally put away and you actually resemble more a child of God than is currently the case, you will not be more of a child of God than you are right now. We understand this with our own families. A child's misbehavior may bring grief to a parent, but it will never bring a lowered status to the child. Our son, Matthew, is a good driver now. But that has not always been the case. During his first year of driving as a sixteen year old, he had a total of six accidents, as well as several speeding tickets. Two of his accidents were backing into my car while it was parked in our driveway, on two consecutive days. On the second day, he was so flustered that he didn't even tell me what he had done. And these were not minor fender benders; damages totaled several thousand dollars. Though I was not happy with my son at that moment, never did the thought enter my mind that he should be disowned. Even saying that now is so foreign to me as to give me a sick feeling in my stomach. He's my son, and I love him and am committed to him as long as there is breath in my lungs. So it is with God's love for us.

John takes us next from the present to the future, when Jesus appears at his second coming. He says, **“we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”** Jesus is the most truly human being who's ever lived. He shows us what God had in mind when he created us in his own image. To be human is to love God, to love others, to be full of joy, to live as a dependent creature, trusting God fully. It means to be pure and holy, and Jesus is all those and more. The time is coming when we will be like him. Right now, we struggle against sin, sometimes with good results and at other times not so good. But on that day, the struggle will end, never to return again. What a delightful prospect it will be to have the things I most want to do be the very things that please God the most! Sadly, it is not that way now.

What brings about this glorious transformation? John says that it is seeing Jesus as he is. What is it about this vision of Jesus in his glory that will be so powerfully transformative? I don't know everything we are going to see when we see Jesus in his glory, but there are at least two things I can think of that will lead to such change. First, we will see the glory of Jesus, and it will put the final nail in the coffin of all self-centeredness. It is this self-centeredness that leads us away from God and into sin. It has proved itself to be a hard enemy to

dislodge from our souls. But to live a self-centered life is to live a fiction. I am not in fact the center of all things. Jesus is. On the day when we see his glory full strength, when we see those other glorious creatures of heaven, the angels, all gathered around Jesus worshipping him, when we see him on his throne of power and authority, our self-centeredness will feel to us like eating a bowl full of maggots in comparison to the finest meal at a five star restaurant.

A second thing we will see when we see Jesus are his wounds. The eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection report that Jesus carried his wounds with him in his resurrected body. When you see Jesus in his glory, the nails will no longer be in his hands, but the ugly wound will still be visible. The spikes through his feet will be gone, but not the disfiguring marks they left. You won't see the spear that pierced his side, but you will see the unnatural hole in his side. And these wounds speak loudly and clearly one dominant truth. It is God saying to us, "See how much I love you. This is how far I was willing to go to bring you to myself, to bring you into fellowship with me and with your fellow image bearers." That love will speak to us deeply and will transform us.

III. Purification in the Present

John concludes by saying, "**And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure**" (3:3). This hope is not the kind of hope we speak of as a wish for something that would be nice if it happened. We might say, "I hope the UAB Blazers basketball team wins the national championship next year." I might hope for that, but I don't really expect it. Hope as the Bible speaks of it is rather a confident expectation that something will happen in the future. Such confidence affects our behavior, even in the earthly realm. I have a confident expectation that my car will move forward as a result of the burning of gasoline mixed with oxygen. My behavior is to make sure that I stop at a gas station when the needle registers toward empty.

Here's John's point. We can see Jesus even now. We won't see him with the clarity of our physical seeing of him face to face on the day of his return. But we can see him now with eyes of faith. And as we do so, it changes our lives. We come to share his values. We gain a heart for obedience.

CONCLUSION:

Our closing hymn is a very ancient one. It was originally an Irish hymn written in the early years of the transformation of Ireland from a pagan nation to one that worshipped Jesus. It is a prayer that God would fill us with this vision of himself, that we might be transformed. "Thou my great Father, I Thy true son; Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one."