

Are You Ready for Him to Come?

1 John 2:28-3:3

Consider the following imaginary conversation between Jane and Jill. Jill's husband Joe is a Marine who is about to come home after a long deployment in Afghanistan. While this conversation has been made up by me, it will sound somewhat familiar as this kind of dialogue can be heard all of the time in this town.

Jane: Are you ready for him to come?

Jill: Almost, I have only a few more things I'd like to get done.

Jane: How many more days?

Jill: Only twelve more, I think, maybe more maybe less. You know how it is with the Corp. They love to keep us on our toes and guessing.

Jane: What have you done to get ready for Joe's return?

Jill: Well, for starters, I cleaned out the man cave, a.k.a. the garage. Joe will want to get to his tools when he gets home without having to trip over the kids toys. I also spring cleaned the entire house from top to bottom. I peeled the old wall paper in the kitchen and repainted it. I also did some landscaping. I planted a couple of trees and some bushes. Did I mention that I also power washed the siding and windows, sealed the deck, and stained the fence?

Jane: Have you been working at all this the whole time Joe has been gone.

Jill: Pretty much.

Jane: Oh girl, you are going to wear yourself out.

Jill: I'll be fine. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that we got our sign made for the fence at the gate, the kids have drawn all of their welcome home pictures for daddy, and I splurged a little and got a new outfit for me for Joe's homecoming and a new recliner for him. I want him to know how I appreciate his hard work.

Jane: Haven't you gone a little over the top?

Jill: Not at all. I want Joe to know how much I love him, how much I have missed him, how I have thought of him the whole time he has been gone, and how excited I am to see him.

While this imaginary conversation has been exaggerated just a little bit, it depicts the preparation that is common among Marine wives in anticipation of the return of their husband from a long deployment.

How would we compare the preparation of Jill for her husband's return from deployment with our own preparation for the coming of our Lord? Are we preparing ourselves for His appearance with the same diligence, anticipation, and excitement? Are we ready for Him to come?

Read 1 John 2:28-3:3

The book of 1 John reminds us repeatedly that in order for us to enjoy fellowship with God, we need to be like Him. In 1 John 1:5-3:10, John describes God as a God who is light, a God who is holy. The implication of this truth for us as God's children is that if we desire to enjoy fellowship with Him, we must be holy.

In 1 John 1:8-2:2, we learned of the provisions that have been made by our Lord for our holiness and for our restoration to holiness when we commit sins. In 1 John 2:3-27, we looked at four pieces of evidence that, when present in our life, demonstrate we are in fellowship with God. We know we are in fellowship with God when we are obeying His commands in general (1 John 2:3-6); when we are obeying God's command to love one another (1 John 2:7-11); when we are not loving the world (1 John 2:15-17); and when we are recognizing and rejecting false teachers (1 John 2:18-27). In conclusion of his discussion of our need for holiness to be in fellowship with a holy God, John exhorts us as God's children to apply the truth we have learned in our daily life.

Exhortation of God's children to demonstrate His holiness (2:28-3:10)

As God's children, we want to demonstrate clearly that we belong to Him. We want to live in a holy and righteous manner that reflects the nature of our Heavenly Father and makes it obvious that we have been born of Him. We want to live in a holy and righteous manner so as to prepare ourselves properly for the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is the key to our preparation? What is the key to becoming holy as our Lord is holy?

Central Thought: We need to abide in Christ in order to be righteous and ready for His appearing (2:28-3:3)

Exhortation:

Abide in Christ in preparation for His coming (2:28)

“And now, dear children, continue in Him...” John addresses these words to all of God's children—to those who have been born of God. The word John uses here for children addresses his audience as God's spiritual descendants and has nothing to do with age or maturity. Regardless of whether we have been a child of God for a day, a decade, or 100 years, our need is the same. We must abide in Christ if we are to live a godly life. The power to walk with Christ flows out of Christ. We are not able to live a Christ-like, holy, and righteous life by our own efforts. We can't do it ourselves. We must draw from Christ's supply. He is the source of

righteous, holy living. We must live in close communion and fellowship with Christ and depend on Him to produce the fruit of a life like His in us.

Do we find ourselves discouraged as we look at what our life is like right now? Are we nervous Christ could come today because of what He would find in us at this point in time? Is our frustration due to the fact that we have been struggling to try to make holiness happen through something that comes within us? We can't make it happen. Let's stop trying to do it ourselves and start abiding in Christ, depending on Him as the source for making holy living happen.

If we abide in Christ, we'll have confidence when He appears

The Greek word translated confident literally means freedom of speech. If we are abiding in Christ and thereby living in a righteous and holy manner, we will not be afraid of speaking up in Christ's presence. We will not shy away from giving an account of our lives. We will be able to speak with openness, assurance, candor, and confidence. The opposite is true of how we will respond when Christ appears if we were trying to live in our own strength. If we are trying to do it ourselves, we will have anything but confidence to speak in the presence of Christ.

Two children were asked to clean their room while their mom was away for an hour. One child worked diligently while the other played and didn't touch his room. When mom returned and asked for an account of each child's actions, how do you suppose the response of these children differed? One would be able to say with confidence, "Yes, mom, I cleaned my room just as you asked." The other would be silent at first out of fear and then would begin his sentence with something like, "Well, um, you see..." Which of these manners of speaking would characterize us in Jesus' presence if He were to come for us today?

If we abide in Christ, we'll not be ashamed when He appears

The Bible is clear that for the believer in Jesus Christ, there is absolutely no need to fear condemnation or punitive judgment as there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The fact that the believer will never be condemned for his or her sin does not mean that there will not be any negative consequence felt for unfaithfulness. I believe that for believers who are not abiding in Christ when He comes, who are trying to manage life on their own and without Him, who are trying to live life in their own strength, there will be feelings of shame at the Bema Seat as divine disapproval and loss of reward is experienced there to the degree that person has failed to abide. Those who live life doing what comes naturally, who try harder to live a holy life themselves and without God's help will feel embarrassed before Him when He comes. Our ability to stand before Christ confident and unashamed when He appears depends on whether or not we are abiding in Him and thereby living a life of holiness.

After John's sobering exhortation in 1 John 2:28, he provides assurance. I believe John's purpose in 1 John 2:29-3:3 is to bring assurance to his readers of what God has done (He has enabled them to live lives that are characteristically righteous) and what He will do (Believers will be made perfectly righteous by Christ when He comes for us) as motivation for how they live now. There is need for exhortation for John's original readers to abide in Christ since they

are to some degree or another not living as they should. Because of this, they lack the complete joy that God intends for them to experience.

Just the same, the characteristic pattern of righteousness in their life assures them that they have been born of God, that they are His children. Another basis of assurance John shares is the fact that Jesus will come for them and close the deal, making them completely righteous, like Him.

Words of Assurance:

Our living a life characterized by righteousness demonstrates we have been born of God (2:29)

God is righteous. We know this. John's original readers knew this as well. Likewise, we also know that everyone who characteristically does what is right has been born of God. We want to be careful on this point. A lifestyle characterized by righteousness does not produce the new birth, but it does provide visible evidence that an individual has trusted in Christ and has been born of God.

When we as a habit of life, when we not by a single act but by a pattern of successive acts, live a righteous life, we know we have been born of God and belong as members of His family. Again, we want to be careful here. John is talking about characteristic righteousness, not perfect righteousness. Later in this passage, John indicates that the process of our being made perfectly righteous like Christ won't happen until Christ appears. John is clear that those born of God will never be perfectly righteous while living in this fallen world, but he is also clear that those who are born of God will be characteristically righteous.

How can we be so sure that those who are living a life in which righteous living is their habit have been born of God? First of all, God's Word tells us so. Secondly, no one who is not a child of God would ever be able to pull off a life characterized by righteousness. Such a life comes from God, it is not in us to be able to live such a life by our efforts.

Our hope is that we will be made perfectly righteous like Jesus when He comes for us (3:1-3)

God's love is the basis of our hope

It is because of God's love that we are His children

Again, in a reassuring tone, John urges His readers to reflect on God's love for them which made it possible for them to be called and to become children of God. We are called God's children and have become God's children because of God's love, not because of anything we have done or could do.

The NIV does us a disservice in omitting the word "see" or "behold" from verse 1. God's love is something we need to behold. Hiebert and Jackman write, " 'See,' calls upon the readers to take

a heart-moving look at the amazing love which gave them membership in God's family...We need to take time to contemplate this love and allow its reality to sink down into the depths of our being." Such an exercise should inspire astonishment, admiration, and awe. Behold the love of God which worked to make guilty, destitute sinners like us the children of God.

Behold the love of God which ever seeks the welfare of the one loved despite our being undeserving and is willing to extend itself to the point of sacrifice. Behold the love of God that brought such visible, transforming results in us.

There is a simple, memorable chorus that helps us to remember the exhortation of 1 John 3:1:

Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us

Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us

That we should be called the sons of God

That we should be called the sons of God

As God's children, the world doesn't understand us

The world doesn't know God and therefore doesn't know His children. The world doesn't get it! Because those in the world do not know God, they aren't able to know and understand spiritual realities, nor are they able to know and understand us and why we are different. We should not be surprised then when the world treats us poorly or by the fact that they are unimpressed with what God is doing in us. While in the present we experience persecution from a world that cannot discern what we are or why we are different, our future is glorious.

Our hope will be realized when we see Jesus

Right now, we are children of God, but it isn't yet clear what we will look like in the future. God is not finished with us yet. Each day as believers, we become more and more like Christ as we abide in Him. However, as long as we are living on this earth, we will not yet be able to become perfectly righteous, nor will we be able to see what we will be like when we are ultimately and completely conformed to Christ's likeness. I appreciate Lenski's comparison of us to an uncut diamond that presently shows no brilliant flashes from reflecting facets. Just as we can't quite picture how a rough, uncut diamond will look until the master craftsman cuts it, we can't yet see what we will look like when Jesus appears and we are made to be like Him. While our being made to be like Christ in the future is a sure thing, a sure promise of the Word of God, it is unimaginable.

In this life, we observe a number of life changing encounters. For example, the people on the reality television show "The Biggest Loser" experience dramatic physical transformation when they encounter trainers Bob Harper and Jillian Michaels and the process they put them through.

Likewise, we have observed encounters that people have experienced with mentors, teachers, athletes, and heroes that have worked to inspire them and change their lives. While the changes that can be observed as the result of such encounters can be impressive, they are nothing compared to the dramatic transformation that will take place in us when we see Jesus face to face. At that time, we will get a full view of Him and will be immediately conformed to His likeness. As opposed to the process that is usually required for changes that take place in people here on this earth, the transformation that takes place when we see Jesus will be instantaneous.

God will finish what He has started. When we see Jesus face to face, we will be made to be like Him. We want to be careful to note here that we will be LIKE Him. John doesn't say that we will be equal to Him. As John MacArthur observes, "The glorious nature of our conformity defies description, but as much as glorified humanity can be like incarnate deity, believers will be, without becoming deity."

In what way will we be made to be like Jesus? Many apply this to our glorified bodies. While it is undoubtedly true that our bodies will be glorified when we see Jesus (Philippians 3:20-21), that is not John's emphasis here. John's emphasis is how we will be like Jesus in the sense of having a completely, fully developed Christlike character. The character of Christ, His perfect holiness and righteousness, will be formed in us. What a glorious and assuring promise! This hope for the future should and will cause us to pursue being more like Him now!

When our hope is fixed on Christ and what He will do in the future, it affects how we live now

We want to purify ourselves now

If being like Jesus is our hope, if that is what we are most looking forward to, if that is our focus on which we set our sights, we will be motivated to move in the direction of being more like Christ right now. We will habitually seek the purification of our lives morally and spiritually right now. Those who look forward to the hope of being made to be like Christ will purify themselves. Do we?

We look to Jesus as our standard of purity

Here we come to a similar point which we considered when we were in 1 Peter. The standard for how pure we should strive to be is Jesus. In response to our hope for the future, we will purify ourselves "just as He is pure." Jesus is the standard. The standard isn't other people and how they compare with us, it isn't the consensus of what others say is holy and pure, it isn't even the consensus of what Christians think. The standard for how pure we need to strive to be is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's purity isn't a standard we will be able to reach in this life, but it is the standard we strive for. It is the standard we seek to get closer to as we abide in Christ, looking to Him to produce His character in us.

Are we ready for Him to come?

When I think of this question, I am reminded of the words of Crystal Lewis' song, "People Get Ready, Jesus is Coming"

So people, get ready. Jesus is coming.
Soon we'll be going home.
People get ready
Jesus is coming to take from the world his own.
So people, get ready. Jesus is coming.
Soon we'll be going home.

Are we ready? Are we abiding in Christ, depending on Him to produce His character in us so that we can be confident and unashamed when He comes? Are we living in such a way that we reflect our family likeness—that we characteristically display the righteousness that is like that of our Heavenly Father? In view of the love of God towards us that has worked to make us children of God and the hope of one day being completely righteous and pure like Christ, is our life being affected now? Are we living a life characterized by righteousness, holiness, and purity?

Consider again the introduction to this sermon. A marine wife is diligent about her preparations for the homecoming of her man. Are we any less diligent about our preparations for the coming of our LORD? May God help us to live in such a way to as to experience the joy of being confident and unashamed when He comes.