

We Shall See Him

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[0 : 0 0] We read together from that section and first John the end of two into chapter three. And these twelve verses, they need three sermons because every single clause, every single word really in this section is so rich, there's so much there.

But we're only going to do one today, not three, just one sermon this morning. And this is John writing this letter, first John, it's probably at the very end of John's life.

He's probably the very last apostle living when he writes these words. And at the very beginning of the letter, he had said in the last days of the apostles, the most important thing that you can know is that the meaning of life is to know God, to have fellowship with the living God above all else, to have a relationship.

And he said to us already that if you have that, if you know God, if you have fellowship with God, that you can know joy in the midst of hardship, you can know hope when you face death, and we all will.

And you can even have meaning today in the midst of such a fractured world. And that knowing God gives you all of those things. And the second big thing he's told us so far is that if you know God, you can also have assurance that you know God, that you can actually know that you do indeed know God, that you can be sure and confident in that.

[1 : 3 1] And he's told us that in so many different ways that that's possible, and that's really what this passage again is about. It's about knowing God and having assurance that you know God.

And the big idea here is that he's telling us that if you do know God, there ought to be transformation in your life. That if you have real fellowship with the living God, that that should create change, moral change, ethical change in the way that you live your life.

And he says that repeatedly over and over again. You can see it if you just look down at verse 29, he says that if you know, if you've been born again, if you're a child of God, then there should be righteousness.

He says if you know the God who is righteous, then you should manifest a life of righteousness. And then if you see down in chapter 3, verse 9, he says that when we're born of God, we no longer make a practice of sinning.

And so John is telling us here that part of our assurance of knowing that we know God is transformation in our lives, that the gospel brings transformation in the way we live.

[2 : 4 1] Now, he says it even more specifically than that. It's not just moral change, but the word that John wants to use to describe that is he says there should be in our lives, quote, righteousness.

And that word shows up either explicitly or implicitly 13 times in these 12 verses, righteousness. And that means we've got to think carefully about what he means by righteousness.

And the reason or the way of understanding this, we've got to ask why should we be righteous and how can we be? That's what he's getting at here.

And so here's the three things we need to see. First, we need to be righteous. We need to know what righteousness is first because we shall see him as he is. Secondly, because we will either stand or shrink when we see him.

And third, he tells us then how to get it, how to get righteousness. So let's look at those three things. First, he tells us about righteousness and he says we need to know righteousness because we will see him as he is.

[3 : 47] Now, you can see in chapter three verse two, this is one of the most famous moments in the Bible where we're told that one day we will see God.

You can see it in chapter three verse two, he says, beloved, we're children, we're children now, but what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him.

We shall see him as he is. And you just scan your eyes back to verse 28, he says that one day when he appears. And so three different times in this passage, John uses the language that he is going to appear.

And he's saying there, he's saying there that your life can only be understood properly and rightly when you know that God is coming back down into this world and that you're going to see him, that your life is only understood rightly when you believe, when you know that the one who already has come into this world and appeared is going to come back to this world and appear again a second time.

And here he's talking about the appearance of the Son of God in history. And the verb that he uses three times to appear is a verb that every other time in the New Testament when it's used refers to physical sight, refers to actually seeing something in the flesh.

[5 : 18] It's not talking here about some mystical idea of having a vision in your dreams, in your heart, it's not talking about the imagination, it's not talking about something merely spiritual.

He uses the verb for physical sight and he's making the claim that one day there will be not just a spiritual vision, not just a vision with the eyes of faith, but a physical vision of the living God when he comes again.

And the he there is talking about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has already come and he's coming again. Now look, the Christian claim, the Christian claim, it's incredibly significant.

It's big. It's to say that we believe that Jesus Christ in the future is truly coming in the flesh into this world to live here finally and forever.

And that has to determine the way you understand your present day life. And we all know this, that what you believe about the future actually radically changes the way you live your life in the present.

[6 : 31] Imagine that you're a factory worker on an assembly line. I was looking at some pictures, sometimes you get caught in these deep internet rabbit holes where you just keep clicking on Wikipedia links and you never know where you're going to end up.

And I ended up this week down a deep rabbit hole of looking at the history of the world. The history of factory work from the 19th century forward somehow. I have no idea.

And I saw a picture of just after World War II in the UK, a major appliance company and the way they had set their factory out. And this major appliances company was building, were building, they were building washers and dryers.

And they had all these people on these factory lines where these washers and dryers would come by and hundreds of people dedicated to doing nothing but putting little bolts on the bottom of these washers and dryers before they were going to go to market.

And the washers and dryers were on a conveyor belt at about knee level. And so that meant that the people all day long were bent over with their backs completely arched, screwing these bolts on. Now imagine that you're one of them and you get offered this job and the employer brings you in and says, we're going to pay you 20,000 pounds in 2022 for nine hours, five, six days a week, you're going to be bent over, you're going to be screwing these little bolts on. And you know, you do the work for a week and you're having to go to the chiropractor.

[7 : 57] Immediately, and you're in the break room and you're complaining like crazy and you're unionizing left and right, everybody hates it. But then the employer brings you in, the next person, and he says, we're going to pay you 2 million pounds for this job.

And you know, your back is arched and bent over all day long and you're whistling. You know, you're singing a tune, you say, who needs a lower back? Lower backs. I don't need my lower back. It's 2 million pounds. I don't care. And look, it's a silly example. But the point is what you believe you're going to get, your expectations of the future always determine not only your actions, but your emotional life, your will, your desire, the whole of who you are from top to bottom is often determined by what you believe about your future. And the Christian claim is that the future is certain and that it is that Jesus Christ is going to enter into history one more time in the flesh and that he's going to do it finally and forever. And that means that for the Christian, this is the Christian claim, not just for the Christian, but for the whole world, that actually the meaning of human history is only rightly interpreted and understood in a vision, a belief that you will see him again. Now, let me say one more thing about that. And that's not only the fact of his second coming, but also the quality of that site. In 1 John 1 and 2, sorry, here in 1 John 3 in verse 2, John says, we shall see him, quote, as he is.

And it refers to the quality of that site. He had told us in the beginning of 1 John 1, 1 John 1, I have seen him. I saw him. I looked at him. I heard him. I touched him. I gazed upon him. And I think John here, when he says, we shall see him as he is, is thinking, I've already told you that I saw him as he was in the past. I saw him when he was living a life as a Jewish carpenter.

I saw him in his what we call humiliated state. And remember, so many times in the Gospels, nobody understood who he was. Nobody could see who he truly was. And the Bible talks about the glory of God and the glory of Jesus Christ. And that word glory means his weightiness, weightiness, that when you see him truly as he is, you're struck with his heaviness. The heaviness of what it means that he is God become man, the weightiness of the reality of who he is, only in certain moments did he unveil himself. The amount of transfiguration, all of a sudden, a couple of guys get a glimpse of who he really is. And they're knocked back by his weightiness.

We see it momentarily after he's raised from the dead. But what John is saying here, John's saying, I'm an apostle, I saw him as he was. But that was not as he is.

[11 : 03] And one day you will see the living God, Jesus Christ, as he is. And that means you're going to get a glimpse of true glory, of weightiness, of true meaning in itself. And I think what John is trying to say to us there is that you need to expect that when you see him, every single desire that you've ever had that has been left unfulfilled will be fulfilled. Every single longing that you've ever had that you've hoped in, what you truly want from life, it's only then that you're going to get it.

Have you ever had this very human experience? If you're a human today, you've probably had this very human experience. And that's, it's in moments where you really want a relationship, let's say, you really long for a relationship. And you get that relationship and it's good.

But it's not everything you had thought it was going to be. That's what Heather says about me, not me about her, of course. But, or you've really wanted the next step in your career and you get it. Maybe you've even reached the pinnacle of your career. And it's good, but it's not great. And there's always this little hole of disappointment, no matter what you achieve in life. And even the greatest achievers, that's why we pity celebrities. They feel the disappointment more than anybody.

And you know, that's a great apologetic and argument for Christianity. Because it means that if there really is, there really is a hole that cannot be filled, no matter what you accomplish, no matter the relationship that you achieve in life, there really is still always going to be this hole there, that you will always be disappointed. And that's precisely because you were made for something. You were made to see the living God as he is and only seeing the living God as he is can ever truly fulfill your greatest desires and your deepest expectations and your greatest longings. It's only this and this is coming. And oh, what it will be like. Oh, what it will be like to have joy complete. Now, we will see him as he is. And then that leads us secondly to think about this. What happens when you see him? What do you do with this? What will happen? And what do we do with what will happen today? This is where righteousness comes in. And we're told here in verse 28, you can see it secondly, that there are two possibilities. Little children, John says, he's writing to his friends and he says, when he appears, we may have confidence, abide in him, so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame. So John says that every single human being will see him as he is and that only one of two things can happen.

And that's either you'll stand before him with all your joy or you'll shrink from him. And what is John thinking about here? Well, this word that's being translated here as shrink from him is a word that we see across the Bible in the Old and New Testament. It shows up, you'll remember famously in Romans 1, when Paul says, I am not ashamed of the gospel. It's the same word for shame.

[14 : 44] It's being translated here to shrink away in shame. But I think that John is thinking of something more specific here. And he subtly references it at the end of this passage. But I think he's thinking all the way back to the beginning in Genesis chapter 3. Because this word to shrink, to shrink and hide, is the exact word that is used in Genesis 3 when it says that Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed before God. And then naked and ashamed. It's the same exact word and it's being translated here differently. Remember that Adam and Eve stood before God. What does it mean there to be naked?

It means to be truly as they really were. That God could see them. He saw everything about them. He knew them inside and out. And they stood before him in confidence, unashamed. And then just a moment later in Genesis 3, they now, he appears again and then they shrink, they hide.

They get behind a bush and say, I can't let the Lord see me like this. And you see, that's John's twofold choice here. He says, you'll either stand naked and unashamed, exposed. Jesus will see you for who you really are, but you'll be confident and joyous in him. Or you'll be like Adam and Eve after and you'll shrink and be ashamed. And what stood for John, he says it here, this is what stands in between. What stood in between Adam and Eve's nakedness, full of confidence, unashamed, truly known and yet loved all the way to the bottom. And then hiding from the living God.

What stood in between was John says lawlessness, lawlessness, lawlessness, that special word in the New Testament, which means disorder and chaos and breaking things as they were meant to be in rebellion and everything that's wrong with the world. What stood between was their lawlessness, their disorder. In other words, their unrighteousness. And so what he's saying here is that to stand before the living God in confidence is to know righteousness and to shrink and hide is to be unrighteous, to be lawless. That that's the condition, that that's the difference. It's like when if you've ever had the experience of going to a black tie party in your black tie, your tuxedo, your evening dress, you feel great, you feel confident, you feel beautiful. But if you show up to the same party in a bathing suit and you're the only one, oh boy, do you feel naked and ashamed and you hide and you shrink, it's exactly that sort of feeling. And here he says that the difference is righteousness. Now he says something very precise and very important about this in verse 29. He says that he says that if you know that he is righteous, God, that God is righteous, you can be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. So listen, he's saying that the condition of standing before the living God in confidence and joy is to be righteous and that to be righteous is to be quote, born of him. That that's the condition. That's very important. Now look, many people today in Edinburgh in 2022 and maybe you're here, you're going to look at this and say, are you really saying that some people are going to be ashamed, that it's possible to be ashamed before the living God because of lawlessness, because of unrighteousness. And I heard it put so commonly this week, I was listening to a podcast of one of my favorite comedians and the comedian in a throwaway line at the very end of the podcast simply said, you know, I really think that most people are good. And what he was saying there was what so many of us experience all the time. We know our neighbors, we know the people around us, we know people that believe all sorts of different things than we believe. And we know them to be kind. We know them to be nice people, we know them to be generous sometimes, we know them to be patient and sometimes even more patient than we are. And you say, you know, I think most people are generally good people. Now look, when the Bible talks about righteousness, it's talking about something very different. It's not talking about being generally a nice person, being generally known as a good person, a person who is a decent citizen and doesn't commit crime, and is kind to their neighbors. It's talking about something very different than that. And Jesus unveils for us what he means by this most acutely in the Sermon on the Mount. You know, you remember in the Sermon on the Mount, he says that when the Bible speaks of righteousness, it's talking about something more than rule following and kindness. And the way he gets at it is he asks the people he's talking to, you know, do you follow the rules? Maybe you do, maybe you're a pretty good person and you follow the rules and you're a decent citizen and you've never committed a crime and you've never harmed anybody in a significant way. And you generally speak kindly to your neighbor and you're faithful to your spouse and all sorts of things. This is what Jesus takes up. But then he says, in your heart, in every single one of your deeds and all of your history, have you done that action in perfect selfless love? You know, has your motivation in your actions been total love for the living God

and for the person next to you? Completely selflessness, complete selflessness. And he says, only when you combine utterly pure motivation with perfect action can you then talk about righteousness. That righteousness is to do everything in your life with the best of motivations.

[20 : 55] And I think no matter if you were the comedian I was listening to this week or maybe in your heart you said, look, I do think most people are basically good or most of the time good. That's one thing, but if you just for a second examine your own personal motivations for why you do things, I think you can uncover very quickly that we are not righteous.

You know, have you ever said a kind word to somebody but done it because you wanted to be, you wanted them to give you a favor in return, you wanted them to flatter you? We know that our motivations at rock bottom are manipulative. And look, even if you're not a Christian today and you say, I'm not sure that I buy the Christian narrative that people aren't basically good, that we're fundamentally lawless and unrighteous, I'm not sure if I buy that.

Can let me ask you this question. Can you at least admit this that you would love to live in a world where the people that you lived with in your home, the people that you worked with, the people that are your neighbors acted towards you with such perfect motivation that they never had any other motive than love for you? Can you at least say that, that you want to live in a world where everybody around you acts towards you in a way that is perfectly loving without any manipulation? Can you say that? Of course you can. And can you say that there's a gap there in the reality of what we really, the world we really live in? Oh boy, get on Twitter. Yeah, we're not righteous. We're lawless. We're unrighteous because our motivations aren't healthy. Everything we do comes with mixed modism. What John is saying here, what John is saying here is that when you realize that, when you hear what he's saying, when you look at the sermon on the Mount, if you face the facts, the only thing that you can be led to say is, I need to be born again. My motivations are wrong.

My motivations are lawless. I need the new birth. I need a supernatural gift. I need something to come from outside of me. I need a righteousness that is not my own because I don't have it.

If I'm going to see the living God, if I'm going to stand before him, I need righteousness that is alien to me. And in chapter 3, verse 1 to 3, and we can say this in 30 seconds, John, all of a sudden, breaks out. He changes the subject. He's trying to talk about being righteous before God and not giving you assurance. But then all of a sudden, he says in chapter 3, verse 1, if you're reading from the ESV, it says, see, but it's not the word see. It's behold.

[23 : 47] All of a sudden, John breaks out and says, behold, what kind of love the Father has given to us. And you see what's happening in that moment? John realizes it. He realizes his own problem. He realizes as he's talking about righteousness, even as the great apostle that he doesn't have it. And so he breaks out and says, behold, can you imagine the love that it takes to give to people that are lawless, that reject the living God for the living God to come and say, I will make you my child. I will make you righteous even when you're not. That's what John is doing here. He's saying, behold, what kind of love has been given to us that we should be called children of God when we are not righteous?

That if you're to stand before the living God and not shrink and be ashamed and hide away, you need righteousness. What kind of love the Father has given to the world? Well, it's the love of the gift of righteousness. All theology ends in one statement. Jesus loves me this I know. And that's exactly what John is saying here, that in the midst of our unrighteousness and our faulty motivations for all of our deeds, Jesus loves me this I know that Jesus Christ, the one who came the first time, the one that John saw as he was, he came and took my unrighteousness so that I might know his, that at the cross he ate my wicked motivations so that when I stand before him one day I might be named righteous. And John says, see what kind of love, now look, do you have that today?

Do you know that kind of love today? The love of the gift of righteousness that is not yours and that you cannot have without him. And look, here's how you know, are you today, are you today in any way in your heart saying, behold, look at the love of God? Are you saying, are you, are you thinking about it and then doing what John does? And all of a sudden breaking out and rapturous acclaim, behold, what love the Father has given to me that I should be named child of God, even though I don't deserve it. And if there's any part of you today that's saying that, that believes that, then John says of you, you are, that we are, that we are a child of God, you have it, you have the gift of righteousness, and you can be confident that you will not shrink, you will stand and all of your desires will be fulfilled in him. Now thirdly and finally is the command.

The command says this, abide in him so that you can be confident. Now lastly, he gets to assurance here and he's saying that only by the gift of righteousness of being born in him can you stand before the living God. It's not about your righteousness, but then he comes and says, but you can know that you have it. You can look at your life and ask, are there signs that I do stand confidently in Christ? And here's what he says, abide in him and you know that you do. Now look, this needs a sermon, maybe two. We can't get into all that this means because John spells this out and in my notes, six different ways he tells us to abide in him, but I can only give you one, only one, that's all we can do right now because we're running out of time.

And here's what he says, here's his most clear way of saying what that looks like. He puts it positively in verse 29, verse 3 and verse 7 and he says that if God is righteous, if you're born of him, there should be evidence in your life that you are living righteously. He says that in verse 29, verse 3, he says if you are hoping in him, then there is purification happening in your life, that there's change happening. In verse 7, he says righteous action comes from being righteous in him as a gift. So three times at least he says the positive side of it, he says practice righteousness.

[28 : 07] When you practice righteousness, meaning when you act in a way that your deeds are motivated by love, true love, the love of Christ, then you can say there's real change in my life, that's practicing righteousness. But then on the negative side, verse 6, verse 8, verse 9 and 10, verse 9 he says it very dramatically, that those who have been born of God cannot continue to practice unrighteousness or sin. Now, Jesus, John says here, a sign that you've been changed, that you've been born of God, is that you practice righteousness, not sin. And let me clear the air, because some of you right now are thinking this. You're thinking verse 9, no one born of God practices sin any longer.

And you say, you know, I've been with you, you're saying this in your mind, I've been with you up till now. And I can say, I know that my motives are not righteous, I can say, I know I need to be born of God, I can reckon with that, I can say, I can even say behold what love, I can even say, I want to see Jesus Christ face to face, I can say all that. But when you get to the part where John says anybody who's been born of God no longer sins, now I ask, am I a Christian? You know, I'm not, I'm not there anymore. I've been with you for four steps of the way, but the fifth step, I'm not there anymore. And goodness, he says, whoever keeps on sinning is a child of the devil, that's his language. Oh boy, is there anybody who isn't? And I've not, I personally have not been a pastor for very long, not too long, not relative to people like Derek, who's much older than me, much, much older. I've not been a pastor for very long. But I do know this, that in the places I've pastored, I think it's the same, and all pastors would say this, and all of us know this, that people that are Christians, they come to a pastor and they say, look, here's the things I'm really struggling with in my life. And here are the sins that I'm not able to overcome in my life, and they keep grabbing me and haunting me. And I've heard some of you say, I thought that I would have grown more by this point, and I thought there would be more change in my life by this point.

And now John comes and says, if I am really born of God, then I shouldn't be practicing sin any longer. And now I'm asking the question in my heart, is there a single Christian out there?

Is there one? And let me say to you that though it sounds that way, this is what John means, because you have to read it in context, and here's the context. Okay? Verse 2, he says, only when you see him will you be truly as he is. Now remember that. He says that only when you actually see Jesus will you be fully righteous. So in the immediate context, he qualifies it and says, don't think you'll be fully righteous in this life. You won't be. He says it in verse 2, but then in chapter 1 verse 8, he says, Christian, if you go around saying you're not a sinner, then you're a liar. He puts it in bold terms. And so John's already told us, don't go around saying you're not a sinner. But then in verse 7, he says, do not be deceived. And that's when you know, as we close, and we'll close with this, that's when you know that what John is talking about here is actually someone very specific in the local church, that there is someone, there's a group in his local church that are going around and living in such a way that denies the most simple commands of God for how to live in this life. They're acting in total disobedience, and they're saying that it's totally okay. So there's a group of people in the local church here in Ephesus that are living a life totally disobedient to God and saying this is okay. It's not even sin. It's fine. That's the circumstance here. And the reason he puts it in such strong language is he's coming and saying, don't be deceived by those people who are saying that you can say you're a Christian and live in habitual utter sin, stuff that's so obviously opposed to the commands of God, and both of those things be okay at the same time. That's what he's talking about. And so the commentators often put it this way, when John says, do not make a practice of sinning, he's saying that the Christian does not make sin their normal habit, does not habitually sin and react indifferently to it and say, I'm okay with it. I've got grace. He's not talking about occasional struggle. He's not talking about something you can't defeat. He's not talking about wrestling with personal sin in your life. He's saying, do you wrestle? Do you struggle with your sin? Are you fighting it? Then you know, then you know that there's transformation happening. Or is there habitual sin in your life where you're literally, quote, making a practice of sin and you're indifferent to it? It's not striking you.

You don't feel like it's wrong. Then he's saying, that's danger. That's a warning sign. That's danger territory. That's where you need to ask the question, am I born of him? Now, the last word is this, don't hear this. John's saying to you, me saying to you, well, John doesn't really mean you can't sin any longer. He really is saying, it's okay. You're a sinner. You're going to continue to sin.

[34 : 04] Well, let me say this. He is saying that, but don't settle for that. Don't settle in and say, well, John is saying occasional sin. Therefore, my occasional sin is fine because I've got grace.

And you do have grace, but don't hear him saying that. In other words, the message to the Christian today is don't settle for sin. Don't practice sin. And just let that command wash over you.

Don't practice sin. Not because if you don't, you'll get righteousness. You can't do that. It's only a gift. But because you have righteousness, don't practice sin any longer. Don't settle for mud pies in the slum when you could have holiday at the beach. That's an obscure, that's obscure.

But what he's saying here today is the day Christian for saying, I want to repent of the sins that I'm struggling with in my life, not because I can become righteous, but because he's made me righteous.

How do you change? Chapter three, verse one and two, behold him, behold Jesus Christ, contemplate and long for the vision of God. Look at him and he will change you. Let's pray. Father, we ask now that you would help us to put away our sin. And I ask that you would show us the pathway to true righteousness, which is a gift. So today, would you work in our hearts, Lord, if there are some here that are wrestling with what it means to have the gift of God, righteousness, would you show them, Lord, the beauty of the gospel, the good news that it's a gift? And for those who are Christians today and share in that gift, would you help them to see their sin and to repent of that sin and to long for holiness? The holiness without which we will not see the Lord of Lord.

[35 : 58] Give us holiness, we pray. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.