

God With Us: In Heaven

1 John 2:28 - 3:10

Caleb Blevins
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Like Penny said, my name is Caleb Blevins. I serve as the youth director here. It's an honor to open God's Word with you and open it to people that are over the age of 18. It's a nice, nice change. Welcome. I love our youth, but I'm also excited to open the Word this morning. If you have your Bible, you can go ahead and turn to 1 John 2, verse 28. If you don't have your copy of God's Word, there's Bibles in the chairs in front of you, and the passage will also be projected on the screens. These passages that we've been taking up during the season of Advent, where we've been looking at the theme of God with us, we've seen throughout these various encounters that man has had with God. So we opened up in the Garden of Eden, then on Mount Sinai, in the temple, and in the manger. And Advent's a time of preparation, and Advent's over, and we stand in the season of Christmas, which also makes us think and prepare for how we're going to have the hope of God with us again in the future. And so that's what we'll be looking at this morning. So let's turn our attention now to chapter 2. We're going to read from verse 28 to 3:10.

“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.

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.” (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let us pray.

God in heaven, we come to your word this morning to hear from you and to know you. That you be with us now as we look at this passage. By your Holy Spirit, open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things from your word. Give me the ability to speak and the clarity of thought so that you would be made known. It's in Christ's name that we pray, amen.

The passage opens this morning with these words: “And now little children abide in him, or little children remain in him.” The audience that John was writing to is being called to commitment, devotion, and life in Christ, as we're called to today. But commitment, not just

to God, but to anything or any person, is difficult. Think about if you've ever tried to get into running. I used to run in high school and middle school. I would like to think that I was really good at it, but I dropped it in college. But there's been a few times I've wanted to get back into it, because I've had countless conversations and listened to people who run talk about running like it's the best thing in the world. You listen to them talk about how far they can run, and sometimes it's pretty amazing. Or what they see in nature, the races they run in, all the places they get to go to do a race, or what place they finish. That's some of the appeal of athletic competition.

But if you're also a runner, or if you know a runner, you know they run regularly, right? So they can continue to be able to keep their fitness and stay in shape. And the way they usually do this is by setting a goal. It's a time they finish under, or a race they want to qualify for, and they focus on that goal, right? They have a friend, or people, a coach, that would hype them up, and get them excited, and ready to press on. They get a running partner who can help pace them to be better. And they do this because the commitment to running isn't easy. It's uncomfortable to start, that's why I can't get back into it. But they know where they're going to end up, and so they press on to it. And in our passage, the command to abide in Christ doesn't come to us in the form or need to clench our teeth, but to love and follow Jesus, and that's because the Christian life isn't easy. We live in sin, we're sinners, we know that we are sinners, but our future is what our passage points us to, as God's people, which is a future that's characterized by the hope that one day Jesus is coming again to restore all things.

Our Future Gives Us Hope

So in those first four verses, John's writing to encourage believers to remain faithful to Christ, and that encouragement comes in two connected ways in those first verses. So look with me at chapter 3, verse 1, where it says this, "...see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God and so we are." So we see faithfulness to Christ first can be encouraged through seeing and knowing the great love of our Father. In the ESV, there's a word translated, "what kind of love", but some commentators say a better understanding would be, "what a great love." See what a great love the Father has shown us, that we should be called sons of God. And I think that's helpful because what we're trying to do here is emphasize the greatness of God's love, how incomparable it is that we poor, wretched sinners are recipients still of the love of God and being called His children.

We also see a sign to encourage us to remain faithful here is to consider what awaits us. This is what he spends a lot of time on, what awaits us when Jesus comes again. We see this in chapter 2, verse 28, and chapter 3:2. So 2:28 said, "... 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." And 3, verse 2, "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." So in those two verses, we see three blessings that await us as we join with Christ.

First, we see we can have confidence at His coming. That word "confidence" there also carries a connotation that we would have joy, that we would be fearless. That word's used a couple of other times in John's letter, two times in this context. We have confidence as we join with Jesus in heaven, but also that we can have confidence to go to the Lord in prayer. So think about how easy it is for us to pray, right? There's no need for ceremony, we just start praying oftentimes, wherever, whenever. And sometimes we probably forget how awesome it

is to speak to our Father in heaven when we're doing something like driving to work, or walking into that meeting, or doing the dishes, or praying for patience with our kids as we're losing patience with our kids, asking for the Father's help. And we know we can go to Him in prayer because God tells us, it assures us, that the Lord hears us. And so, we oftentimes just do it second nature. We don't have usually a fear if He will hear us or not. We have some kind of confidence. But that confidence will be much truer when we can stand before Him and see Him and speak to Him. We'll not only have the blessing to be able to stand confident.

Another blessing is that as we stand in front of Him, we also won't be ashamed as we stand in front of Him. Now, shame is used as a euphemism in the Old Testament sometimes, for the disgrace of a sinner and the exposure of a sinner to God's wrath, or God's wrath on His enemies. Kids, you know when your parent asks you to do something, right? And they tell you, you know, take out the trash, walk the dog, or clean your room, and you don't do it, then you know your parents are going to come back later, and they're going to ask you a lot of questions. Why did you do this when I told you not to? And I remember, because I was a kid, we got very scared and ashamed. We know we did wrong. And we knew we were going to face questions from our mom or our dad. And parents, you know that when your kids do this, you really need to tell them something like, "you don't need to be afraid." Because we still love them, even though they disobeyed us. At least a conversation has to be had because of disobedience. And maybe a consequence is necessary, but there's no reason for them to stand before us in shame. We need to give them a reminder of our love for them. And when Jesus comes again, we can stand confidently before Him, before the throne of grace. We know of the great love that's been shown to us.

Now, maybe we hear this, and we read what John's writing, and we think it all sounds good in theory, but there is no possible way that we could stand confidently or not ashamed before Jesus. Our mind starts racing back to all the things we've done, all the doubts we've had, the questions, the uncertainty. But the third blessing helps us deal with that. In verse 2, it's said that we are God's children now. An emphasis on the now. That even with our sin and our doubt and our questions, if we have put our faith in Christ, then we are God's children right now. We already belong to Christ, but it isn't done yet, right? Because God doesn't intend for us to suffer under the curse of sin and death. John makes this clear when he says, "what we will be has not yet appeared, or known or revealed to us yet. Now, New Testament writers and theologians for centuries have marveled at this experience of what exactly happens when this will be made known to us. We know as believers we're promised eternal life, a new body that's free from sin and suffering. But if we spend time thinking about it, it's so far beyond anything we could imagine. Because all we know is wrestling with sin. And we know that at the end of our lives, death awaits us unless the Lord comes again before death. And we just can't begin to fully comprehend how awesome that's going to be.

John continues saying that we know that when we will be made like him, because we shall see him as he is. When we see Christ, when we have a vision of our Savior, we will be transformed entirely. Paul reflects on this in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 12, where he writes, "for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known, conquered." We know that Jesus has conquered sin in us, we know that's a reality for us as believers right now, but when he returns, it's finally eradicated from us. We know Christ is alive and reigning now, right? We sang that in joy to the world, that he's come and that he's come to make his blessings flow everywhere now, but one day we'll get to see it and experience it. Sin and curse removed from us.

So, think of that just in the context of where you're at in life. Perhaps you're sick or hurting. One day we'll be free from that. Or the sin that you have struggled with for what seems like forever, one day, we won't struggle with that anymore. Perhaps we're overwhelmed, fearful of the future, of the brokenness in our family and in our friends, and one day all this will be made right. The Reformer John Calvin once said, "For as to our body we are dust and a shadow, and death is always before our eyes; we are also subject to a thousand miseries, and the soul is exposed to innumerable evils; so that we find always a hell within us. The more necessary it is that all our thoughts should be withdrawn from the present view of things, lest the miseries by which we are on every side surrounded and almost overwhelmed, should shake our faith in the felicity which as yet lies hid." Calvin knew, as you and I know, that it's so easy to focus on what we struggle with in this life. The sin that we're constantly weighed down by, and what we need to do is continue to fix our eyes on what we have in the future, that when Christ returns, those who have put their faith and hope in him will be able to stand before him, not condemned, knowing, experiencing one day that we'll be made like our Savior.

Our Future Transforms Our Present Lives

This future hope, though, it's not something we just look into the sky and wait, and hope would come sooner rather than later, but it also changes us here and now. Our future transformation has an impact to it, and so what does that look like? How are we supposed to live as God's children today? Chapter 2 verse 29 says this, "if you know that he's righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. And knowing that our God is righteous, then we in effect practice righteousness as well." Now, to hear that, we need to be living in righteousness and righteous lives, and think that it's coming from within ourselves, we are doing this on our own, but notice there in that verse that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. Born of him shows us that our present ability to do righteousness is preceded by God's work. So we show are belong to Jesus by living like Jesus, through Christ-like living. So consider how Jesus lived his life in the gospel. Set your mind on one of the gospel stories, or think about what encapsulates all of Jesus's life, it's obedience to God and a life seeking to honor his Father in heaven. He spent time serving others and loving his neighbor, not seeking to gain a reputation or clout with religious leaders or Romans. Jesus spent his time in the temple on the sabbath, and he took time out of his busy schedule to pray when he needed to rest.

All we need to do is hear how to hear how we ought to live our lives, like Jesus is to remember or read these stories of his life in the gospel. And by doing so, it shows that we belong to God and not to the devil. And that's what John spends many verses, verses four through ten. In his book, John frequently is writing with these bold contrasts to make points. He has a passage with God and devil, these two contrasts, but other points in the book, he talks about darkness, light, love, hate, passages you've heard if you've read 1 John before. And here, with the God-devil contrast, he seeks to make this point: the person who sins is of the devil and the person who does righteousness is born of God. And that can be a little jarring at first, especially with the stark contrast. John might be saying that the person who does any kind of sin ever is not a Christian. That looks to be the point when we read verses 8 through 9, but remember who we are, God's children. John's already been clear that what we are right now isn't who we will be. It isn't who Jesus intends we will be forever.

He's given us new life, and we're beginning to live in ways that evidence that we've been given new life from God. And at times, yes, we sin, but we've been born again, and that can't be cancelled out.

So what would an imperfect but authentic Christian life look like? It's seeking to live in a way that Jesus lived, by seeking to love the Lord and love our neighbors. But true Christians are saying that who we are isn't who we will be when we're with Him. John helps clear this up when he says that Christians, true Christians, don't seek to live lives of lawlessness, meaning that you and I don't seek to hate this idea that God would make moral demands on us, that He sits in authority over us. So we don't seek to be throwing off His authority. Or maybe we let our faith and our belief have room in our lives only when we're here, at church on Sunday. Or we take the teachings of the Bible as a weapon that we use to really love to point out other people's sins, but we hate it when it points out ours, so we try to ignore it. Friends, the good news of the gospel is that we have a God who does forgive us when we confess our sins. He's merciful, and He's just to forgive us of our sins. We can have an eternal inheritance of life and fellowship with Jesus, with Jesus right beside us, and that, yes, even though we sin, the scripture says that God doesn't deal with His people according to those sins. And knowing those things, we can press into the love and the mercy of the Lord. We have a future hope of life with Christ, which is guaranteed to us as His children. Amen. Let us pray.

Our Father, You have blessed us with the hope of eternal life. As often as we are downcast at the state of our lives and our world, we ask that You would lift our heads to see Your great love. Remind us that our inheritance is in heaven, and that You are with us by Your Spirit, making us new even now. We long for that day when we will be with You, and You will transform us into Your image. Help us, we pray, to live lives that show that we belong to You, so that others might know of life through Christ, in whose name we pray these things. Amen.