

When We Meet Jesus 1 John 2:28-3:3

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Who is the most important person you ever met? The most famous individual with whom I ever spoke was Ronald Reagan. It was at the Westwood Hotel in Grand Forks, North Dakota, August of 1975, over five years before he was elected President of the United States. I got his autograph that day, and for the last few years I have not been able to find it, though I am hoping it turns up again. The most important person I have met as far as impacting my life is Nancy, not Nancy Reagan, but my wife, Nancy. I met her in the Twin Cities at Wooddale Church in 1983. Yet, some day I will meet someone far more important than Ronald Reagan, Nancy, or any of the other folks who have had a significant impact on my life. Some day I, like every genuine Christian, will meet Jesus face to face. Today as we continue our journey through 1 John we will be looking at 2:28-3:3, which describes this magnificent event. Let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us to see how our expectation of this meeting with the Lord Jesus should impact our lives today.

John tells us our meeting will occur at His Second Coming, sometime in the future when He returns to this earth. **1 John 2:28** *So now, little children, remain in Him, so that when He appears we may have boldness and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.* "Little children" is a term of endearment John uses for his readers, including us. The two phrases "He appears," and "His coming," are used by John to refer to Jesus' return. Now, to many folks this sounds like a fairy tale. Jesus was on this planet two thousand years ago. How could He possibly come back? A few years ago Senator Phil Gramm said our country has certain problems "That will not be solved until the Lord returns." The New York Times responded by claiming that the return of Jesus was the teaching of a cult. Even many Christians find the topic of Jesus' return to be confusing and sensational. Yet, it is not something weird. It is the clear and foundational teaching of the New Testament. One Bible scholar says that of the 318 New Testament chapters, from Matthew through Revelation, 260 of them refer in some way to Christ's return. Though John does not discuss

this topic in detail, he clearly believes it is a fact that Jesus will come again.

Someone may be thinking, "Pastor Dan, you seem like an intelligent and educated person. How can you possibly believe in something like the Second Coming?" My answer is that I believe in Jesus' return the same way I believe in His deity, virgin birth and resurrection from the dead. Friends, Christianity is not irrational. As a world view it is extremely consistent and coherent. It makes sense. Yet, at various points it extends beyond the realm of natural understanding. Jesus' remarkable life, especially His resurrection, make Him totally unique. In fact, if a person was dead for three days and then came back to life as Jesus did, and then claimed He would one day return to earth, I think it would be foolish to dismiss that claim. The bottom line is this: The Bible teaches that Jesus will return to earth and Christians will spend eternity with Him. The Bible is either right or wrong on this point. If it is wrong, if the Bible doesn't describe truth and reality, then I don't think there is any reason to be a Christian. In I Corinthians 15:19, the Apostle Paul tells us it is not worth following Jesus if this life is all there is. Thus, if the Bible is wrong about Jesus' return, we have no basis to believe anything it says about spiritual reality. The reason I believe salvation comes through faith in Jesus, rather than through following Mohammad, is because the Bible tells me so. If the Bible is wrong about a central teaching like the return of Jesus, there is really no reason to trust it at any point.

Now, I am certainly aware that Atheists and those who embrace scientific naturalism scoff at the idea of Jesus' return. Of course, they also scoff at every part of the Bible's teaching, including Jesus being the Son of God and His resurrection from the dead. Scientific naturalists don't believe in life after death for anyone. In fact, they have no reason to believe there is any objective meaning, morality or knowledge for human beings, because from their perspective we are nothing more than cosmic accidents. However, if you believe God visited this planet once in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, it really

should not be that hard to accept that Jesus will come again.

I am also aware that many of you are very interested in the details surrounding the promised return of Christ, while others are a bit confused by them. Some Christians think this meeting John describes occurs when Jesus returns to earth at the end of the Tribulation. Others believe it happens when the Rapture occurs, before the Tribulation, and there are other theories as well. But, John doesn't seem concerned about those details. His focus is on the *fact* of Christ's return. No there is nothing wrong with studying or discussing the details. That can help us understand and appreciate biblical truth in a greater way. People who study music appreciate music more than those of us who just listen. However, what is essential is that we all are aware of the basic truth that one day, Jesus Christ will return, and when He does those of us who are genuine Christians will get to meet Him. John tells us there are two ways which anticipating meeting Jesus impacts our lives:

Number one, knowing we will one day meet the Lord Jesus fills us with joy. There is a joyful expectation as we contemplate this event. **3:1** *Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know Him.* Those first two words are important. "Look at," or KJV "Behold," means ponder this important truth. Think about how God has called us to be His children. He has adopted us into His family and has actually made us His sons and daughters. This process is accomplished through faith in Jesus and spiritual rebirth, as we are born of God, born again. It is described this way in John's gospel, **John 1:12, 13** (NIV) *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.* What a magnificent reality. Those who by God's grace trust in Jesus Christ become God's children. Many like to think that everybody is a child of God. God is the Father and we are all brothers and sisters. Yes, God is the Creator of every human being, and in that sense, we might call Him the Father of all. To be really adopted into His family, however, one must receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If you have done that, you really are God's child.

3:2 *Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is.* Though we are God's children, we have not really met our Father, yet. In some ways, we are like an orphan girl waiting to meet the parents who have chosen to adopt her. Yes, God has written to us and told us about Himself in the Bible. He has sent us a priceless gift, the Holy Spirit. So, in a very real way God is already with us. Yet, one day, one day, we will actually meet God. We will see Jesus Christ.

Another analogy the New Testament uses also helps. Jesus is the bridegroom. We are the bride. The custom in some cultures is that the groom and bride meet each other for the first time on the wedding day. Because some of you have had bad experiences on blind dates, it might sound a little scary to marry someone you have not seen before. Yet, this is a case where the bride, even though she has never seen the groom, is certain he is more wonderful than she can ever imagine. The delight of simply being in his presence will be beyond her wildest dreams. Thus, as she awaits her wedding day, this bride is full of joy. Friends, we should be filled with joy as well, no matter what else is happening, because we know that our wedding day is coming. And we can be sure it will be the happiest day we can ever imagine.

Number two, knowing we will one day meet Jesus also fills us with hope. Keep in mind the biblical idea of hope is not just wishing that good things will happen. Rather it is a confident expectation of what God would do in the future. **3:2** *Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we Will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is.* Friends, this is one of the most marvelous statements in the whole Bible. Theologians call it "glorification," the final step in our salvation. This is the time when finally, we will be like Him, we will be like Jesus Christ. Yet, we might wonder, "How will we be like Him? Will we look like Jesus? Will we talk like Him? Will we have the same power Jesus demonstrated when He was on earth or that He has now in heaven?" Well, for one thing being like Jesus will impact how we look. The New Testament is clear, especially in 1 Corinthians 15, that when we meet the Lord Jesus we will have glorified or resurrected bodies. Now, I don't know exactly

what these bodies will be like. Some think they will be the white shimmering bodies that angels are portrayed as having. However, the Bible doesn't teach that.

We know that after His resurrection, Jesus' glorified body did not have the limitations His physical body did. He apparently walked through closed doors to appear to His disciples. The Bible makes it clear that these new bodies will have no imperfections. There will be no need for glasses, braces or canes. These bodies will be free from aches, pains, warts and even scars. Yes, there will, I think, be some continuity between our current bodies and our future ones. Various individual distinctions will probably be maintained. Yet, I can assure you that each of us will be good looking! Yet, most important, we will be like Jesus. And the most significant way we will be like Him is in our character. When He appears, we will be like Him because we will no longer sin. We will be like Him in that we will freely choose to love and obey God all of the time. Our nature will be transformed so that, like Jesus, we will delight in doing God's will. All our issues which make us different than Jesus, such as impatience, lust and selfishness will vanish. When the Lord Jesus appears, there will be some changes, big changes, bigger in some of us than others, but all of us who are genuine Christians will be like Jesus in our character.

How will God accomplish this? I don't know. I don't really understand how the process God will use is going to work. But I do know John says character transformation will occur, "Because we will see Him as He is." I think he means that actually meeting Jesus face to face will drive every ounce of pride, selfishness and rebellion from our lives. When we really see the pure love and goodness of Jesus Christ, we will not be the same. Now, some folks might say, "But that didn't happen to the people when Jesus was on the earth. Even His closest disciples didn't always obey Him." There are two differences, however:

1. When Jesus came to earth the first time there was a veil over His identity. When Peter, James and John caught a glimpse of the splendor of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw His true identity much more clearly than they had before.

2. According to 2 Corinthians 4:4 those who are not believers in Jesus have been blinded by the evil one so they cannot see who Jesus really is. Even those of us who are Christians, whose eyes opened by God to truth about Jesus, now only, 1 Corinthians 13, "See through glass darkly." We now have only a distorted view of who Jesus really is.

Yet, one day, when we meet Him, we will see Him as He truly is. And that will impact us in ways we cannot imagine. And then we will become like Him. And friend, knowing this means whenever you get frustrated with your own imperfections, whenever you are discouraged because you have lost your temper with the kids again, whenever you get weary of the struggle with your sinful nature which causes you to end up doing and saying things which you know are wrong, you can have hope. You can be confident it will not always be that way. Though we are far from perfect right now, when we see Jesus things will be different, because we will be like Him.

So, what is it going to be like to meet Jesus? Suppose during the next year I travel to every capital of the world and have a personal, two-hour audience with every president, prime minister, and king on the planet, including the Pope. Then I go to the Super Bowl, the World Series, NBA and NHL All Star games, meet every famous athlete there is. Then Nancy and I have Franklin Graham, Tim Keller and Ravi Zacharias over for dinner. That would be a pretty exciting life, at least for me. Yet, even if I did all that hobnobbing with the rich, famous and powerful, it would not even be a shadow of what meeting the Lord Jesus will be like. No matter how good we think it will be, it is going to be better. Friends, knowing this should fill us not only with joy today, but also give us hope and confidence that there will be even greater joy in the future.

Now, maybe you are thinking, "Pastor Dan, this stuff just doesn't seem very practical. It is kind of 'pie in the sky religion.' I want a Christianity that helps me here and now." Friends, I agree that our Christian faith must be practical. But I think knowing we will someday meet the Lord Jesus is very practical. Our belief in the Lord's return should be a part of our normal, every day lives. It should not be just something we discuss in a Bible study. It should

be something which makes a difference in our lives when we go to work on Tuesday morning or when we are watching a movie on Friday night. So, what does our confidence Jesus will return mean for our lives today? Three things:

Number one, knowing Jesus will return means we must make sure we are truly a believer in Jesus Christ. Friends, every human being will “meet” Jesus some day. Those who by God’s grace have trusted in Him as Savior and Lord, and are now God’s children will experience the joyful meeting John describes in our text. Those not trusting in the Lord Jesus to save them from their sin, will come face to face with Jesus as their judge. That will be a terrible experience. All of their greed, lust, and selfishness will be exposed and will be in stark contrast to Jesus’ absolute purity and love. The Lord will then speak those awful words to those who are not genuine Christians: “Depart from me for I never knew you.” Friend, if you are not certain you are a child of God, if you are not sure you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your savior, as God enables, that is what you need to do today. If you don’t really know what that means, please talk to me or Pastor Mark after the worship service.

Number two, for those of us who are Christians, our knowledge that we will one day meet Jesus face to face, enables us to have joy even in the midst of adversity and tragedy. Maybe you feel deep anxiety because you see some personal storm clouds on the horizon. Perhaps you are being ridiculed and rejected by others because of your faith in Jesus. Maybe you are suffering chronic physical or emotional pain. Or perhaps you are grieving because of the loss of a loved one. Friend, whatever your circumstances, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you can look forward with joyful expectation to meeting Jesus, knowing that then everything will be okay. Friends, even when life is not going the way we want, even when we have one of those horrible, rotten, no good, very bad days, when we want to move to Australia, we can be joyful. We can smile. We can sing. Because we know that one day we will meet the Lord Jesus.

Number three, our knowledge that we will meet Jesus when He returns, motivates us to obey the Lord. **1 John 2:28** *So now, little children, remain in Him, so that when He appears we may have boldness and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.* When some people had decided the Second Coming of Jesus was about to occur, they

went up in the mountains with cans of food and simply waited for it to happen. John says, “No...that is not what to do.” Knowing Jesus will return should fill us with hope and cause us to go out and live the way the Lord calls us to live. In his book, “Future Grace” John Piper says that the primary biblical motivation for obeying the Lord is not gratitude for what the Lord has done for us in the past, but hope in what He promises to do for us in the future. Piper says, yes, we should indeed be grateful for all God has done for us, especially for the work of redemption where Jesus died on the cross in our place and then rose from the dead to guarantee our salvation. However, and He makes this point very persuasively, the Bible writers point to God’s promise for future grace as the number one reason why we should seek to obey the Lord.

Obeying the Lord involves devoting ourselves to serving God and loving other people. Friend that includes treating your spouse with respect. It means forgiving others in the church who may have offended you. It means when the Lord gives you the opportunity to share the truth of Jesus Christ with someone at work you should speak up. It involves being totally honest in your business dealings with others, and completely honest in figuring your income taxes. Friends, when it seems hard to keep doing what is right, when we are weary, when the giant of discouragement is lurking at our door, then we should stop and think about what it is going to be like to meet Jesus face to face. We need to let the joy and hope of that anticipated meeting fill our minds. When that happens, the shadow of despair will begin to disappear, and we will be able, as the Apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:58** *to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*