

FIRST JOHN PART 5 “The Hope of His Appearing”

1 John 2:28 thru 3:3

This is our last lesson of the year (Dec 19). No Sunday School next week, just worship service as we celebrate Christmas with our families. Then back to normal the following week (Jan 2). I love this time of the year as we remember the birth of our Savior. We all know the Christmas story (Matt 1:18 thru 2:23 and Luke 1:5 thru 2:39). Mary and Joseph, baby Jesus, angels, shepherds, Bethlehem, a manger, the star, wise men. When Jesus appeared on the scene the first time that fulfilled O.T. prophecy: “Immanuel, which means God with us” (Matt 1:23). Did you know that the Apostle Paul had his own version of the Christmas story? It’s in Galatians – “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). The Apostle John summarizes the Christmas story like this – “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The first time Jesus appeared was in human flesh, as a newborn baby. And the reason He came – to save us from our sins – is what gives Christmas its significance. We all know THAT story. We all love THAT story.

But as wonderful as the story surrounding Jesus’ first appearance is, what should excite us is that the world has not seen the last of Jesus. He’s coming back again! And that’s what I want to talk to you about this morning as we study First John.

Here’s the passage we’ll be looking at. Five verses from 2 different chapters. As you know the chapter and verse designations were not part of the original inspired text. Our modern chapter divisions were created around AD 1227. Bible verses were created much later – the O.T. verses in 1448 and the N.T. verses in 1551. It’s unfortunate that the chapter breaks where it does here because these verses are a single transitional thought.

Notice the phrase “when He appears” in verses 28 and 2. Before we look at this, I need to give you some context.

At the end of the 4 gospels, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, He spends 40 days with His disciples. During this time He gives them final instructions. He teaches them more about the kingdom of God. He tells them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit who will come and clothe them with power from on high. Then Luke tells us this...

READ Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:9-11, Luke 24:52-53

Every Bible commentary I read said that these two men in white robes are angels. This is how the angels at Jesus’ tomb looked (Matt 28, Mark 16, Luke 24). So these are messengers from God. [Show Q1 slide] Q1 asks, “How do we know for sure that Jesus is coming back again?” Because the Bible says He is. Plus, we have the promise of this given by two messengers from God. And those 11 apostles, the early church and believers throughout church history have looked forward to Jesus’ appearing. [Show Q2 slide] Q2 asks, “Will His appearing be physical (visible) or spiritual (invisible)? It will be physical, visible. The messengers tell the apostles in Acts 1:11 that Jesus “will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.” [Show Q3 slide] Q3 asks, “When will Jesus return?” READ Mark 13:32. Nobody knows. A lot of people throughout history have made predictions, but none of them was accurate. Jesus Himself said, “No one knows...” We believers have been living with this eager anticipation of His return for centuries, nearly 2000 years! We look forward to His appearing. We’ve been given a promise. We have a hope of His return. We just don’t know for sure when that will be. But we do know something about it from what the Bible says. Here’s a glimpse...

READ John 14:1-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

So Jesus is coming again! Let’s talk eschatology (the study of end times). [Show Q4 slide] First, we know from John 14 that Jesus is PREPARING a place for us. From that same passage He promised that He is

RETURNING or COMING again for us. The way I understand the sequence of events surrounding His appearing is that there will be what we evangelical Christians call "the Rapture of the church." The word "rapture" means "to be transported upward." When will this happen? Remember what Jesus said – we don't know. But at some point in time Jesus is going to appear in the clouds. At that time He will gather up His church, those who profess Him as Savior and Lord – both the living and the dead (First Thess 4 passage). When He appears the dead in Christ will rise. They will be RESURRECTED. What will this look like? We can only imagine. The bones, the dead corpses, the dust, the ashes, the vapor – whatever forms the bodies of the dead exist in at the time He appears will be brought out of their graves, assembled supernaturally and then transported upward. The bodies of those who are still alive when Jesus returns will be transformed from perishable to imperishable (1 Cor 15 passage). So, whether we are still alive or dead when Jesus returns our BODY in whatever form it exists will be transformed. All that happens first.

Then, when the Tribulation Period ends, we the saints will return with Jesus in our glorified bodies (the bodies that have been transformed). We will then reign with Jesus in His earthly Kingdom for 1000 years (Rev 19 and 20) – the "millennial kingdom" as it is called. This will be followed by the dissolution of this old world and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21 and 22). This is where we will live forever with the Lord. It will be a very different place than the world today. It will be a place where there is no need of sun or moon, where there is no night because the glory of God gives the light. There we will live forever (21:23, 22:5).

This is all pretty exciting even if we cannot fully grasp it all! If you're a true believer in Jesus Christ this is something you'll get to experience. It's something to look forward to! Which takes us to our passage in First John.

READ 1 John 2:28 thru 3:3 John's main reason for writing the letter of First John is to help affirm his readers in their faith. He wants to assure them that they really are saved, genuine Christians. John tells them that

they CAN know for sure. And here's how – he gives various indicators that tell whether a person is really saved. John's writing style is not a linear logical progression like Paul's which makes it a little harder to follow. John is more circular. He goes around and around, bounces back and forth (read a passage, look back, look ahead). One commentary describes John's argument style as a "spiral." So if I bounce back and forth in 1 John you'll understand why.

John mentions something here that he assumes his readers have heard about before, everything I just read, v 28 and v 2, "when He appears." that Jesus is going to appear. HE'S COMING AGAIN! John assumes His readers already know this. And knowing that Jesus is coming back to get us should positively impact the way we live right now.

V 28, "And now..." John is transitioning to a new thought. "Little children..." John's favorite term for Christians. "Abide in Him..." John exhorts us to abide in Jesus. That word "abide" means to remain or to stay. This is something John repeats throughout this letter. Q5 on your sheet says, "Abide in Him" has many layers to it. The first one refers back to 1 John 2:5-6. READ it. So, one aspect of abiding is our OBEDIENCE to Jesus.

The second one on your sheet we looked at last week in 1 John 2:19. READ it. A true believer remains faithful to Jesus and to His church. They do not leave. Those who remain faithful are the overcomers, the conquerors of Revelation Chapters 2 and 3. So, another aspect of abiding is our FAITHFULNESS to Jesus and to His church.

The third layer of abiding I want you to see we will actually cover later in 1 John 5:4-5. READ it. What you believe matters. Abiding includes remaining grounded in the truth that we first believed, our FAITH/ BELIEF that Jesus is the Son of God. So abiding in Jesus carries with it the idea of believing in Jesus as the Son of God, being obedient to Jesus as Lord, and remaining faithful to Jesus and to His church.

If we're doing that then when He DOES appear we will "not shrink from Him in shame," we will have nothing to be ashamed of. V 29 says that if we "have been born of Him," if we truly belong to Jesus and we know that "He is righteous," then our desire will be to walk like He did and to "practice righteousness." This will be John's emphasis in our next lesson.

READ First John 3:1

V 1, "See" consider, ponder, think about carefully, contemplate ALL that we are in Christ. For starters, Q6 asks "what are we called?" We are the CHILDREN of God! Think about what who we are. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Creator of the universe lives, in us. We are the temple of the Spirit of God who resides in us. Our souls are the life of God. We are fitted for heaven. Jesus has personally prepared a place for us. It's not just that we have a golden ticket to get into the pearly gates. We have a permanent residence on the grounds. We have not just the hope of eternal life – we have the assurance of a life forever with Him. We have direct access to the throne of heaven. From that throne are given to us all the things that we need in life – answers to our prayers, love, joy, peace, faith, hope, the list goes on. The fruit of the Spirit in all its fullness is available to us. Sent from heaven to protect us are all of the ministering angels of God doing His will and fulfilling His purpose. Do we deserve any of this? No, it's all God's grace, His love lavished upon you and me!

The last part of v 1 says, "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him (Jesus). OK, so John just pointed out that we are special because we belong to Jesus. We're children of the king! But if we go into a restaurant, are they going to know all this about us? No. The world doesn't see us this way even though it is who you are. Why not? Why doesn't the world out there know who we are and treat us accordingly? Because they don't know Him. But some day they will know. When Jesus returns in Revelation 19 and sets up His kingdom, we are going to be ruling with Him. They will know then who we are.

V 2 actually talks about this. We ARE God's children. Positionally, that is who we are. But the world doesn't know who we are, not only because they don't know Jesus but because frankly we haven't recognized our full potential in Christ yet. That won't happen until Jesus comes back. Let me give you an exciting thought. This is Q7 on your sheet. When Jesus returns we will **SEE** Him and we will be **LIKE** Him. When Jesus comes back again we will see Him visibly. We will see Him AS HE IS. And get this – WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM. Some day when He returns for us we are going to be transformed. We will receive not only a glorified body to go along with the glorified mind and spirit that we receive whenever we are ushered from this life to the next. We are going to be transformed into the very image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). That's exciting! Alas, it hasn't happened yet.

V 3 John says that knowing this, knowing that one day we will be like Him should motivate us now to want to be more like Him. Hey, John knows that we won't achieve sinless perfection in this life, not in our current fallen state with our bent to sin. He has already established earlier in this letter. We will still have to deal with that each and every day. But we should at least strive to be imitators of Christ. Do you all remember that campaign they had years ago, WWJD? I actually thought that it was pretty good theology. So, Q8 says, "The return of Jesus one day should motivate us to PURITY/ HOLINESS/ RIGHT LIVING" (walking like Jesus walked).

When Jesus appeared the first time (Christmas story) we beheld His glory. We saw the face of God. When He appears the second time not only will we see Him again as He is in all of His glory, but we shall become like Him. What we cannot achieve fully now will one day become a reality for us. Joy to the world the Lord has come and the Lord is coming again!

I pray you all have a blessed Christmas.