

Perseverance and the Return of Christ

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The letter of 1 John which is what we're studying if you're new to our fellowship visiting from out of town or whatever the case may be, we are in the book of 1 John. We've been going through verse by verse. We've come to just a magnificent section of Scripture where we're going to slow down and spend a few weeks on verses 28 and 29 and let me just read those. 1 John 2:28-29 is what we're going to be looking at as John points believers to the reality of the return of Christ and to the reality of regeneration which will come next week. But let's read those two verses, verses 28 and 29 where John says,

28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.
29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

Now, as you read through these first two chapters of 1 John and you spend a little bit of time thinking about them and meditating on them, you start to realize that the grandeur of salvation is so transcendent that we really can't get our minds around it, and the grandeur of biblical salvation, of Christian salvation, is wrapped up in magnificent unseen realities that we could only know if God had revealed them to us in the Scriptures and he has.

Let me show you just a couple of things for you to think about as we think about the unseen realities of salvation. Starting in chapter 1, verse 5, we see the unseen reality of the very nature of God. "God is Light," which means God is holy, God is true, and he is light and his holiness is the central feature of his attributes. Everything that he does flows from his own holy character. We wouldn't know that if God hadn't revealed it to us in the Scriptures, at least with the clarity that he does. Look at verse 7, another unseen reality is that the realm of salvation was purchased for us by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. John says, "if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." An unseen but no less reality; a statement of fact that the blood of Jesus Christ is the basis upon which our sins can be forgiven. Unseen reality. Now, as Christians, the realm that we live in as we walk on this earth, as we live day by day seeking to honor Christ in our lives as we go through various joys and sorrows as the seasons of life come and go, we are taken into, the Apostle John takes us into, as it were, the very throne room of heaven to give us a sense of what is happening and what undergirds the reality of our salvation.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1 where he said, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Now, we spent several weeks just on that one phrase and just seeing the reality that Jesus Christ right now is in the throne room of heaven before the face of God the Father representing us as our great High Priest, as the one who accomplished our salvation, as the one who continually represents us before the throne of God. We have a brother in heaven. We have an advocate in heaven who is there to represent us and to maintain our cause until he comes again. That's an unseen reality. You would never know that except for the fact that it is revealed in Scripture. And what I want to start to dawn upon you is this: sometimes as we go through life we tend to reduce Christianity, what it means to be a Christian, to the things that we're doing day by day, we're reading our Bible, we're praying, those are good things, we're trying to be obedient and live a somewhat moral life and all of that and that's well and good that we should do all of those things, but what I want you to see, what I want you to do is to step back and see the greater hidden picture of the reality of salvation, that the Son of God knows us by name, died and rose again for us by name and now represents us in the throne room of God by name, having accomplished eternal salvation for us in a way that can never fail.

Those are stunning, magnificent realities and that's not all. That's not all, just last week we were looking at verse 27 of chapter 2 where it says, "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you," and what we said is that's a reference to the Holy Spirit. Again, in another unseen reality revealed to us in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit comes and indwells every true believer, instructs them, guides them, keeps them in the truth, is the guarantee, the deposit, the engagement ring that what God has started – oh, listen to me – that what God has started in your life, in your salvation, he will most certainly complete until the end. There is not a true Christian anywhere on earth throughout the generations of time that is going to lose their salvation. That is because God is the author of salvation; what God starts, he completes, and he has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit as his promise that he's going to complete it in us as well. And you see the reality of that, you see the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit based on the changes that came into your life and the fact that you are alive to spiritual truths, spiritual realities. The word of God comes alive to true Christians. True Christians can read the word of God and understand it. True Christians have a love and affection for Jesus Christ. True Christians have a motivation and affections for holiness, real true holiness, not just external conformity to a set of the latest church's regulations, but a desire and a passion and a commitment to see their lives increasingly conformed to the reality of Christ in their lives and to the character of Christ. All of these great great things are things that God has done for us and God is going to complete them, he's going to perfect them and if you're here as a Christian today, the certainty of your existence is that it's going to culminate in the presence of God at the throne of Christ, casting your crown at the feet of Christ and loving him and enjoying the bliss of his perfection, all of his glory for ever and ever and ever. Amen.

Now, if that's true of us, and it is, those of us that know Christ, what I want you to see and if there's anything that I could communicate to you in the early life of Truth

Community Fellowship is that I want you to see and to understand that it is a great and vastly noble thing to be a Christian. There is nothing greater in the existence of man than for a man to be a Christian; to be redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, to have an existence that culminates in heaven, there is nothing more noble and magnificent than that. All of the earthly pursuits and the greatest success that we could ever have in this world pales and crumbles into dust by comparison of having the holy God of the universe having laid his hand on us and drawn us to him so that we would be born into his family. If you're a Christian, make no mistake, you have the most noble possession and the most noble life that exists anywhere under the whole umbrella of the universe. It's a great thing to be a Christian and we should just be absorbed with the magnificence of that and so we have been greatly blessed.

Now, in light of that as we come to verse 28 in those things, look at verse 28 with me again, we see that there are certain responsibilities that flow from that. Verse 28, chapter 2, verse 28, let's read it again, the Apostle John says, "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." There is so much in this verse but John is pointing us to the fact that we live in a realm that is one day going to come to an end. Jesus Christ is going to return. Jesus Christ is going to personally intervene in world history. The book of Acts says that just as he went up in the presence of his disciples, so he's going to return bodily and with visible eyes we're going to look on him. And what I want you to see in connection with what we were just saying is that the days of all these hidden realities are somewhat temporary because there is coming a time where Christ is going to appear and our faith is going to become sight. We are going to see him with our eyes and we're going to see him with literal physical sight and that which we have treasured as unseen, we are going to treasure all the more as seen and in our physical presence and this is what John is pointing to us.

So in verse 28 there, you see he says, "Now," in the New American Standard. He says, "Now, little children." He's using that word "now" not so much to talk about this particular moment in time but rather what he's doing is he is taking everything that he said in the prior 37 verses and he's pulling it together to make an interim summary and to apply it to how it should affect our lives here today. "In light of everything that I've said, now here's what I want you to pay attention to. In light of everything I've said, now here is what your application of this should be."

And he calls them "little children" as he does throughout the letter, a term of affection. He has their best interest in mind. And what he does here is something that you might not suspect if you weren't groomed in biblical thinking and biblical theology. If God is going to keep us, and he is, there is always the detractors and the uninformed and the ignorant who say, "Well, if that's true, then I can live any way that I want to. I don't need to worry about sin. I don't need to worry about pursuing Christ because God is going to keep me anyway." Now, that's what this verse is addressing and is helping us to see through and to understand. What John says here is he gives us a command. In light of all of those realities, those great unseen spiritual realities, Christ in heaven advocating on our behalf, the Holy Spirit indwelling us and the coming return of Christ, in light of all of those

things, far from making us indifferent and lazy in spiritual life, John says, he gives us a command and says, "Now, abide in Him." The Spirit is abiding in you, Christ is abiding in heaven on your behalf, now he gives us a command and says, "It is your responsibility to abide in Him." That's not so that we can preserve our salvation and keep it and if we fail to do so we will lose our salvation, that would be contrary to everything that he said, but rather what he is saying here, he's saying, "You should be confident in your spiritual condition and flowing out of that confidence in your spiritual condition should be an ever increasing transformed life that you pursue these things with all of your heart so that you abide in Christ and you bring forth fruit that is in keeping with your repentance." Abide in him.

Now, the command to abide, the command to persevere, might seem to be unnecessary. If God is going to keep us, why command us to persevere? Well, understand this: part of the means by which God ensures our perseverance, part of the means by which God keeps us, he has given us the Spirit and that guarantees it, but he also commands us to persevere, the command is part of how you persevere. You realize that the greatness of this salvation has implications on your life, you have affections for this life, and you realize and gladly accept and acknowledge the responsibility that our lives, having been redeemed by Christ, the lives, the days that we have on this earth, would be handed over to the glory of the one who saved us. A true Christian would never resist that. The true Christian just says, "Of course. That's what I want. I'm glad for the command and I will obey the command." But this command, understand this, the command to abide in Christ is perfectly consistent with the pre-existing desires in every true Christian's heart. This isn't contrary to our desires, this is what we want because God in salvation gave us a new heart with new desires after Christ and so he says, "Abide in Him," and part of the means by which we persevere is that we respond to the command of God – get this – we're not passive in perseverance, we're active in it. We seek God in his word. We deal with sin as it comes up in our lives. We seek God in prayer. We seek him in his word and we are driven and we're motivated to do that and that's part of the means of the overall package by which God enables us to persevere. We actively seek it.

Turn over to the book of Colossians for a moment, Colossians, just after the book of Philippians in the letters of Paul and before the two letters of Thessalonians. Colossians 1, you see the Apostle Paul addressing these things as well. Colossians 1:28 and 29 where Paul says, "We proclaim Him," meaning we proclaim Christ, "admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose," notice this, "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." You see both sides of it. There is the mighty power of God at work in the life of every true Christian, working out the reality of salvation, sanctifying us, making us more like Christ, and yet at the same time, we don't sit back and say, "Well, I'm going to let go and let God," even though there's a whole realm of viewing Christian life from that perspective. No, we're intended to pursue that, to consciously seek it. That's why God has given us so many commands in the Scripture but those commands aren't directed to the Holy Spirit to do, they are directed to us to understand and to act upon. So we pursue with all of our hearts; we abide in Christ in response to the reality of the salvation that God has given us. God is at work in us and yet

the true Christian strives for greater Christ-likeness. Those two things are not in opposition together, they work in harmony together to bring about our Christian growth and our perseverance in the faith.

Now, go back to 1 John 2. This is all introduction. 1 John 2, back in verse 28. Now he's talking about abiding, persevering, and he has to do this, by the way, just to remind you of the context. Look back at verse 19. There is a context for him calling on them to abide in Christ. Remember from verse 19 that there were false teachers that "went out from us, but they were not really of us." There were false teachers who stopped abiding, showing that they had never been saved in the first place but there were men that had been in their midst, in the midst of the congregation, who had gone out and had separated themselves from true Christianity and so these people, the remnant that was left there in the true congregation was left with the reality that some people had left, some people had stopped abiding. So John brings them back to reality, reminds them of the reality of true salvation and says, "You've seen those people go out, don't be like them. You abide in Christ. You continue on." So that's why he's saying this in verse 28, they had had direct immediate recent experience with the fact that some people had left. Part of the way that God protects us, part of the way that John protected this congregation was to say, "Don't you leave. You continue to abide in Christ and pursue him."

Now, with that in mind, he now brings to bear here in verse 28, look at it with me again, with that command to abide in him, he says, he brings the reality of the return of Christ to bear upon the command to abide. This is magnificent. Verse 28, "Little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears," when Christ returns is what he's referring to, when Christ comes back, you abide in Christ now so that when he returns you are ready for him so that you can greet him with open arms and, as it were, run to him when he returns eagerly anticipating and responding to his return. Abide in him so that that moment of Christ's return is one of spiritual triumph for you; it's one of spiritual victory for you. So that is the context that he says. He says, "We're not just abiding for today, we're abiding in light of a future reality that is certain to come."

And there are three realities about the return of Christ that I want to show you from this verse and from some of the biblical context about this to help you persevere in Christ; to help you persevere in the faith. This is going to be magnificent, at least it will be from my perspective because these truths are just so wonderful from the Scriptures. First of all, the first thing about the return of Christ that I want you to see from this passage is I want you to see the context of the return of Christ. That's the first point if you're taking notes, the context of the return of Christ. Are you ready? I'm ready. He says, "when He appears." When he appears. The word there means to make manifest or it's in the passive voice, when Christ is made manifest, when Christ is made visible. It's the Greek word, phaneroo, and I don't usually refer to that but I need to here because the word that is used here for "appears" is often translated "to make Christ manifest." Christ is made manifest, he's going to be made manifest and what I want you to see from the Scripture is that Jesus Christ has already been manifested to us in several important ways and the Scripture uses this same word that's translated here "appears" to show us that Christ has been made manifest. Why is that important? It's important for this reason: as the Scriptures proclaim

Christ to us, as a preacher preaches Christ to you, as you seek to pursue Christ and to persevere in Christ, what you need to have clear in your mind is that you are not being called to follow something that was done in the shadows, something that wasn't made clear when Christ was here, no, Christ was manifested to the world in which he lived in several ways, in compelling ways, in irrefutable ways, shown to be the Son of God and therefore worthy of faith and trust.

I want to show you four ways that Christ has been made known to us. Four ways that Christ has been manifested to help you see the context of his return. First of all, the incarnation made Christ known. The incarnation made Christ known. What we mean by that is that God became a man in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He displayed himself to humanity by becoming a man himself.

Go back to chapter 1, the first two verses of this letter, 1 John 1:1-2. Christ manifested himself, he was made known to humanity in an objective verifiable way. Chapter 1, verse 1, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life." John is saying, "We as the apostolic community, the circle of apostles, we saw Christ. We saw him with our own physical senses. We touched him. We heard him. He was manifested to us." Look at verse 2, "and the life was manifested," that's the same word that is translated "appears" in verse 28, when Christ appears, it's the same word here, "the life was manifested." The life was made known to us, "and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us." Now, follow me here: Christ was dwelling in heaven before his incarnation. He was in that unseen realm where human beings could not enter; where human beings could not access. He was someplace where we could not go but he stepped out of that invisible realm, as it were, stepped into the earth, took on human flesh and thereby manifested the reality of deity in the presence of human eyes and for 33 years walked on this earth and for three years of those, the final three years being his public ministry, made himself known to many many witnesses. We're not following Christ as some kind of abstract theory of philosophy, we're following a real historical human being who came from heaven and made himself known. That's the point. That should do something to you. That should do something as you think about the Christian life. It should bring a sense of certainty to it. It should bring a sense of confidence to your Christian life. As you follow Christ, you are following someone who was made known to humanity in objective verifiable ways and the apostles are the ones who bear witness of that.

Now, so Christ was made known in his incarnation but it wasn't just that he became a man, there were things that happened during his public ministry that added to the verification. Turn back to John's Gospel now, John 2, and I just want you to focus on the word "manifest" here, that he was made known and he made himself known. John 2. You remember the story of how Jesus changed the water to wine at the wedding in John 2:1, we'll pick it up midstream because I know you know the story. Let's pick it up in verse 7, for example. They are at the wedding and Jesus said to the attendants, he said, "'Fill the waterpots with water.' So they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.' So they took it to him. When the headwaiter

tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from he called the bridegroom," verse 10, "and said to him, 'Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.'" Jesus took these waterpots and took the contents which were H₂O, water, and turned it into wine by the sheer exercise of his invisible power and that was obvious to the headwaiter who was there who had responsibility for serving the guests who said, "That was water but now it's wine. Why have you done this? Why have you kept the good wine back?" Well, look at how Scripture interprets that event for us. Verse 11, "This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee," and there's our word, "and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."

Listen, we said that the incarnation made Christ known, secondly, the miraculous works of Christ made him known. We have to think through these things. Christ while he was on earth did miraculous deeds that vindicated his claim to be God in human flesh and the people who were there were eyewitnesses to these things. They were in irrefutable undeniable manifestations of divine power which human hands could not do on their own. In other places Scripture says that the witnesses to Christ said, "He opens the eyes of people born blind. We've never seen this before. No man can do this. No man commands a lame man lying on a pad and says, 'Get up and walk,' and they get up and walk. That just doesn't happen!" The importance of that for you today is to realize that the Christ that you are following now was manifested in multiple ways, manifold ways; he made himself known so that there could be no question about his deity and therefore there could be no question about his call to salvation, there could be no question about the truth of what he said because his incarnation, his miraculous deeds were the divine stamp of authenticity on every blessed word that fell from his blessed lips. It vindicated it. It showed that it was true because he did what no one else could do. The incarnation made him known, his miraculous works made him known.

Now, thirdly, along this line, we're establishing a context for Christ's return here. Thirdly, his teaching made Christ known. His teaching made Christ known. There are so many places that we could go to but we'll just stick with John here. Turn over to the Gospel of John 17:6. I'll give you a moment to catch up with me there. John 17:6, Christ said, "I have manifested," there's our word again, I have made known, I have made apparent. "I have manifested," he's praying to his Father here, God the Son is praying to God the Father. He says, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You, for," how do they know that? How did Christ manifest himself to his disciples? "For," here it is, verse 8, because, dear Father, "the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me." Christ taught the masses and he particularly taught his disciples and there was a divine authority to his teaching that vindicated the reality of whom he claimed to be. You can go to the end of the Sermon on the Mount at the end of Matthew 7 and people were astonished at the teaching of Christ. They were amazed at his teaching because they had never heard a man teach with such authority as what Christ taught with. Listen, they had had all kinds of teachers around: the rabbis were there, the Pharisees

were there, there were all kinds of teachers around but when Christ came and taught them, it was from a different level. It was a different realm. There was a unique, distinct authority that no one could begin to rival. And by the power of his teaching, he established that he was God in human flesh. He made his true identity known through the power and the clarity and the authority of his teaching.

One more for now. Christ's resurrection made him known. Christ's resurrection made him known. Look at chapter 21 of the Gospel of John. Chapter 21, "After these things," chapter 21, verse 1, this is after the resurrection. Thomas had said, "My Lord and my God," in verse 28 because Jesus had shown him his wounds and now was standing before him alive. John 21:1, "After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way." And it goes on it tells the story about how he made breakfast for the disciples on the beach there. He made himself known. Jesus in verse 12, "said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples ventured to question Him, 'Who are You?' knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise." Notice verse 14, "This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead." We've kind of skipped over some of the points there in John 21 for the sake of time but here's what I want you to see is that Christ in his resurrection made himself known. Everyone knew that they took a dead man off of the cross and buried him in a tomb and sealed it and guarded it with Roman soldiers and yet now here he is out of the tomb alive having been crucified, now he is resurrected and he's alive and he made himself known. He proved in unmistakable ways that he was genuinely raised from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15 goes on and says that he was seen by over 500 witnesses in his resurrection. It was irrefutable. Look, just to remind you of a simple simple fact: in the normal realm of things, dead men don't come back to life. We talk about the resurrection so much sometimes that we almost take it for granted. "Yeah, Christ raised from the dead." Well, wait a minute, wait a minute, dead men don't do that. Dead men stay in the grave. What is a man who is dead being out being alive fixing breakfast for people except for the fact that Christ was no ordinary man. He was God in human flesh and he was making himself known. The fact that he was deity, the fact that he had full authority, that he alone was the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father except through him. The whole manifestation that we have looked at, his incarnation, his miraculous works, his teaching, the resurrection, all vindicate and authenticate the reality of the message that Christ alone can save men from their sins and take them to heaven. That's the context. He's made himself known.

Now, these are all events in the past recorded for us in the infallible trustworthy word of God and what I want you to see, what I want you to just step back and think on for just a moment is that these things that we're talking about here today vindicate the trust that you have put in Christ. Your trust is not misplaced. You have a sure and certain hope. When you have repented of sin and put your hope in Christ as the one who can save you from your sins, Christ has manifested and shown that he has – get this – he has the power to deliver on his promise to save you when you put your faith in him. He has manifested

that in so many different ways. We are not left with a small sliver of testimony and then crossing our fingers that maybe this is right. This is absolutely true and it is absolutely irrefutable, all preserved for us in the pristine, perfect word of God. If you're a Christian here today, that means that you can be absolutely confident about the outcome of your salvation; absolutely certain that it's well with you in the end based on the testimony of Scripture and the manifold ways in which Christ has made himself known. That's the context of the return of Christ, we look at how Christ has manifested himself in the past and we say, "Oh, he has made himself known."

Now, follow me here. There is another manifestation yet to come and that future manifestation is the return of Christ. Now, here in our realm, here in the 21st century, once again, we cannot see Christ with our physical eyes. We walk by faith, not by sight. We love him though we haven't seen him. What John is saying to us here in verse 28 is to realize, "Hey, there is another manifestation coming. Christ is going to add to what he has already done in an event still future to us today and he is going to appear, he is going to make himself known, he's going to be manifested as he intervenes in world history and establishes himself as the King over all." As Habakkuk 2:14 says, the glory of God is going to be seen all over the earth.

Now, we're not going to go into the details of all eschatology here this morning about what that day is going to be and all of that, what I want you to see though and just to grasp the simple basic point is that Christ has promised that he is going to return for those of us who belong to him. John 14:3, we won't turn there...actually we could since we're in the Gospel of John. Just turn over to John 14:3. The simplicity of the language and the simplicity of the grammar here makes it easy to miss how greatly profound all of this is. We're going about life and people don't acknowledge Christ and we preach Christ and, you know, a lot of people think we're nuts and we're crazy and all of that and the world goes on and doesn't pay any attention to these spiritual realities that dominate our affections. It's not always going to be that way, beloved. John 14:3, Jesus, the one who has manifested himself in all these ways and established his authority said in verse 3, actually let's pick it up in verse 2, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." Christ very intentional toward his disciples. He's preparing a place for us and he says in verse 3, "If I go and prepare a place for you," I'm not doing that for no reason, I'm doing it because, "I am going to come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Now, it would be really easy to go off on a huge tangent here but I'm not going to play my tangent card here right now. The simple thing that I want you to see is that Christ said, "I will come again. I will come for you. I will come for my disciples." And the return of Christ is going to be magnificent and – listen – it is going to be another way in which he manifests himself to us and to the world. There is not going to be any question about the power and authority and deity of Christ when he returns from heaven and comes to earth and makes himself known once again. He is going to manifest himself yet again and the reality of how much without excuse humanity is for rejecting him is going to be heightened once more, but for those of us that know him, this is going to be our triumph; this is going to be our glory; this is going to be the fulfillment of our hope, Christ coming again. And notice this, notice this what he says there in verse 3. It's not

just that I will come again, he says, "I will receive you to Myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." Christ hasn't lost track yet of a single one of his disciples and do you know what? He never will. If you belong to Christ, he's not going to lose track of you. When he comes back, it's going to be for you. You are going to be the recipient of divine favor when Christ intervenes in world history and once again makes himself known.

Going back to what we said earlier, isn't it a grand and noble thing to be a Christian when this great catastrophic day for the world occurs, that Christ is going to have in mind you by name and say, "I'm coming for you. I'm going to bring you to myself. And this place that I've been preparing for you, you're going to receive it." This is really humbling, isn't it? I don't deserve that. You don't deserve that. But this is the manifold unspeakable grace that God has given to us in Christ, that the end of world history at the hands of Christ will be our greatest triumph because Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. It's awesome.

Now, go back to 1 John 2 and really, you know, you've got to understand that there are no human words, there is no human speaker that can do these great themes justice with the inadequate words from his lips. There is no one on earth that can speak in a manner that is worthy of the greatness of these glorious holy themes. We just have to lay them out from the Scriptures and let the Spirit of God impress them upon our minds. Christ is coming again. This world is temporary and we're going to be the victors in the end.

Now, that's the context of what John says here in verse 28 and it brings us to our second point this morning. We talked about the context of the return of Christ, secondly, I want you to see our confidence at the return of Christ. Our confidence at the return of Christ. This glorious Christ who has made himself known in so many different ways is coming again and for people who don't know Christ, that is going to be a fearsome, fearful time as the world that they have known is deconstructed all around them, everything is turned upside down, the presence of Christ and his holiness is going to shatter their conscience while they still continue to rebel against him. But for us, for us while it's a time of fear for his enemies, for us it's going to be a time of blessing and John wants us to be confident as we anticipate that day.

Look at verse 28 with me again. He says, "Now, little children, abide in Him," just walk with Christ day by day continuing in him, "so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." Apparently, based on this verse, there are going to be two reactions to Christ's return: there are going to be the true Christians who are confident and, as it were, run to him in confidence to welcome him; there is going to be everyone else who shrinks away in shame knowing that judgment has arrived. And what John says is, "I want you to be confident that Christ is coming for you. We need to be confident that Christ is coming for us," he says there and so the theme here is that persevering, abiding in Christ yields to a certain confidence when Christ again manifests himself.

Now, that word "confidence" there is a wonderful wonderful word. It has the idea of boldness. In fact, in Greek culture this is the word that they used to talk about their

political right of free speech. A Greek citizen had confidence, he had boldness in their democracy that he could speak his mind without fear of reprisal, without fear of recriminations coming upon him because he said something unpopular or different from what prevailing political wisdom was. A citizen could speak freely and it was one of the guaranteed rights of his citizenship in Greek culture, you could speak with confidence and without fear. John takes that word from secular political realms and says, "That's what it's like to be a Christian in the presence of Christ." That is so awesome. It is so awesome that at the return of Christ when he is manifesting his purest absolute authority, you and I as he's doing that can approach him with confidence without fear of recrimination because we belong to him, after all, he bought us with his own blood. And so we can be confident because we belong there, we belong to him, and this confidence is something that is shown throughout the Scriptures to be the birthright prerogative of every true Christian. You see, as you start to grow in the reality of what Christ has done for you, you start to realize that he has eliminated every barrier that your sin ever could have created between you and God. He has removed that barrier so that you have free and confident access to God without fear of recrimination, without fear of judgment. He has so thoroughly saved you, so thoroughly cleansed you from sin that you are absolutely fully reconciled to a holy God and as you walk with him day by day, you grow in that confidence.

Look over at Ephesians 3. I'll skip over a couple of things just for the sake of time here. Ephesians 3. You can see this in the writings of the Apostle Paul as well. Ephesians 3, just after the book of Galatians. Let's begin in verse 10, picking it up mid-sentence, "the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom," watch this, "in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." It's that same word, that boldness, that confidence that to approach God with boldness and confidence is what it means to be a Christian. It's what Christ has purchased on our behalf. We do it now. We approach God boldly and confidently now in prayer, knowing that we are his children and he delights in our prayer. We approach him without fear of rejection as true Christians and what John is saying is that confidence that we have now in prayer is going to be the same confidence that we have when Christ returns; that that's our birthright and prerogative and privilege to approach God in such a way.

Now look, think about this with me: that point in time when Christ returns is the only time in your existence that really matters. If you're right with Christ at that moment of his return, then none of the sorrows here on earth are going to overrule the joy and the reward of that day. When Christ returns and starts to establish his judgment, starts to establish the sheep and the goats, the only thing that's going to matter at that point is whether you belong to him or not. Everything else in the past will become absolutely secondary. It will be absolutely irrelevant. The only point that matters for you is when you stand before Christ when he returns. You see that, right? You've got to see that so that you view this life in the proper perspective. The greatest things that could happen to you here on earth won't compensate for not knowing Christ when he comes in judgment and so what we have to have clear in our minds is the clarity of knowing Christ, the

clarity of walking with him and, as it were, building our lives toward that one great day. That's what John is saying. That great day is the only day that's going to matter and he says, go back to 1 John 2:28, look at it with me again. He says, "I want you to abide in Him, so that when He appears, you might have confidence, we might have confidence at that time." Confidence, boldness. "Hey, Christ is here and I belong with him. I'm going to be with him." That level of confidence is what our Christian life should produce. That's what John says abiding results in.

Point 3 is the concern about the return of Christ. The concern about the return of Christ. We have the confidence in his return that belongs to true believers but see the concern about the return of Christ that comes up in the last half of the verse here. He says, "When He appears, I want you to have confidence so that you're not in this other realm that shrinks away from Him in shame at His coming." There is going to be a whole other realm, the realm of unbelievers, those who have rejected Christ. When he returns, they are going to put their hands up before their face; they are going to shrink away because they know that it's a time of judgment and they're going to shrink away from him. John says, "I don't want that to be true of any of you." And speaking today here, I don't want that to be true of any of you as well. You've got to understand that this great day is coming when Christ returns and it is going to be a separation of the wheat from the chaff, the goats from the sheep. And the only thing that matters is whether you know Christ and are prepared for that day because if you're not, it's going to be day of judgment that yields over into an eternity of judgment. And these things are certain. There is a divine table. This day is most certainly coming. You and I cannot avoid the implications of this day. All of humanity dwells under the looming bell of judgment that is one day going to ring. If you know Christ, you can be confident. Friend, if you're here and you're not in Christ, it's going to be a time of shame and terror and judgment for you. John says, "I don't want that for you." So, he says, bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. Abide in him so that you might have confidence in that great day. And what I want you to see is this, is that just as you turn on the light in a dark room and it exposes what's in the room, the return of Christ is going to turn on the lights and it's going to expose and distinguish between true Christians and nominal Christians; those who said they knew him but genuinely hadn't repented and given their life to him, those who were going through the motions pretending to be someone they weren't. All of that is going to be exposed. There is no hiding from this great day. John says, "Beware. Take care. Those who are not genuine children will flee from Christ but there will be no place to hide."

So we can't help but examine ourselves in light of this and let me just say this, putting on a pastor's hat, as it were, if you're here today and you look at your life and the true assessment that you have to make of yourself is, "Look, even though I'm putting on a front, the truth of the matter is that I have no interest in the things of God. I don't know why I'm here. Somebody drags me here, but I have no real love for Christ. I don't really care about his word." You know, the word of God just convicts you and you say, "This is true of me. I pursue sin and I love sin and up until now I haven't wanted to repent of it but I'm here. I'm putting on the facade." Listen, listen, beloved, the return of Christ is going to strip away that facade and there is not going to be any place to run and hide at that point and so this is your opportunity, once again God has given you opportunity under the

sound of the Gospel to confess and repent of that hypocrisy, to repent and turn from that false nominal Christianity that you have pretended to own, and to repent of all of that, to come out of that, to come out of that and truly give your life to the Lord Jesus Christ. These realities of coming judgment, the return of Christ, leave us with no alternative but those two: I'm a true Christian and I'm going to abide in Christ; I've been a phony all this time. It's time for me to repent. It's time for me to change. It's time for me to stop the heart hypocrisy and fall on my knees before Christ and ask him to save me. That's where this passage leads us. It's either confidence or it's shame.

Listen, I can't make it any simpler than this: for every one of us in here, that day is coming. Every one of us. There is no evading it. There is no off ramp to avoid the day when Christ returns. We're all on the road and it's all headed to that one certain day that God has appointed by which he's going to judge the world through Christ. We're either going to be confident at that day or some of you are going to shrink away in shame. If you're shrinking away in shame, it's not going to be because someone didn't tell you. God is telling you now through his word that day is coming and it is urgent to respond, to come to Christ, and to realize that God is no fool. God sees. He knows the reality of it. And for some of young people who have just been playing games because you were born into a Christian family, it's time to knock it off. It's time to get serious about the reality of Christ and these things. I pray that you would. For the rest of us that know Christ, listen, we are confident. We are joyful. Christ has secured you in a way that will never let you go. Christ knew this day of judgment was coming, he knew you were vulnerable in it, and he saved you. He redeemed you. He rescued you from that judgment in a way you could have never done for yourself. He rescued you and he's going to carry you all the way through that judgment into the place that he has prepared for you before the foundation of the world and you are going to be with him in joy, bliss and perfection. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Let's pray.

Father, as we respond to these things in our hearts, I pray, Father, for those that are here that have just been playing games. God, I pray for their repentance. Father, what more can we say than what's already been said? Now, Father, your Spirit must do the work or it will all have been in vain. Father, I pray that your Spirit would work in the hearts of these falsely professing Christians, the few that are in here, and convict them under the point of true repentance that they might flee from this judgment and find their ark, find their safety, find their refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ. For the rest of us, Father, those of us that know you, Father, we don't pretend perfection in your throne, you're too wise and too omniscient for us to do all of that, but we know that you have saved us, we know that Christ has reconciled us to you. Lord, we rejoice in that. We thank you for that and not because of our works but because of who our Lord Jesus Christ is, we have confidence, we have boldness before you. We ask you to perfect the work that you've begun in us and we pledge to you our loyalty and faithfulness as you continue that work. Father, we long for the day of Christ and his return. Lord, we pray that you would hasten that day. There is nothing more that we want than to see Christ face to face; to see our Savior face to face; to look, as it were, into his eyes and to thank him and then to fall at

his feet and worship. For such a great salvation as what you have given to us, we honor you, we bless you, we thank you for the depths of redeeming love. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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