

# Seeing God As He Is

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**Bible Text:** 1 John 3:2  
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## Grace Protestant Reformed Church

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We turn to sacred Scripture tonight to 1 John 2. 1 John 2, we begin reading at verse 18 and we'll read through chapter 3, verse 3.

18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. 20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. 21 I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. 23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. 24 Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. 26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. 27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. 28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. 29 If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. 2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. 3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

This is the inspired and infallible word of God. May he bless the reading of it to our hearts.

The text we consider is chapter 3, verse 2,

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Hope. Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ the purpose of this text of holy Scripture is to set before us tonight our hope that great future good which God has promised, and that ardent longing within us for that future good. Hope. The subject of the text is hope and that's made very clear from the words that immediately follow in verse 3, "And every man that hath this hope in him."

Not everyone has hope. If you ever have the opportunity to go down into a cave, deep deep down into the bowels of the earth, then I would encourage you to take that opportunity and maybe when you're down in the cave the tour guide will shut off all of the lights, the man-made lights, and then you will be in darkness, darkness as you've never experienced before. Thick darkness, something like falling to the bottom of an ocean of jet-black ink. Thick, thick darkness so that there's not even a hint of the faintest light. Nothing. Nothing to which your eye will be drawn. Nothing to look at. No sense of direction. Surrounded by thick, thick darkness. And that would be a good experience because there are many spiritual parallels, and then we can think biblically, we can think of hell and what hell might be like, and we can think of the Lord Jesus crucified on the cross, but also this, we can think of what it would be like not to have hope. Some people do not have hope and they live all the days of their life surrounded by thick black darkness with no light, and therefore they despair or they turn to the pursuit of the things of the flesh. Hopelessness without God.

We have hope. We always have hope and therefore no matter how dark it may be whether in the day or in the night, no matter how dark it may be for us personally, and no matter how dark it is in the world, and how dark it is getting seemingly by the moment with all of the corruption and ungodliness that surrounds us, no matter how dark it gets and how dark it ever becomes, and it will become so dark one day that God will shorten the days for the sake of the elect, no matter how dark it ever becomes, we believers always have a light right in front of us, the light of the promise of new mercy for tomorrow, and then out, way out in front of us the bright eternal light of heaven. And so always a light that shines back through the darkness into our eyes and into our hearts and that's hope. We have hope and so we press on, onward Christian soldiers and weary pilgrims, we march on through the darkness unto the light which is our hope.

Do not fear. You have hope. Tonight, the holy Scriptures will teach to us what is our hope when we pass through all of the darkness, what is it that is the light on the other side, and the text will teach us that the realization of this hope is simply staggering. Who could ever imagine what our hope really is, and the contemplation of it tonight ought to

fill us with delight and awe in adoration of our great God for, number 1, this is our hope: we will see God. And if you've ever read anything better than that in the holy Scriptures, I'd like to know. We will see God. And secondly, if that's not staggering enough, we will be like God. And thirdly, and this is as staggering as 1 and 2 and lies beyond our full comprehension: we will be made like God by seeing God. The sight of God will be transforming. To see him is to be made like him. That's our hope and that's the hope that is set before us in the word of God tonight. Let's consider it by taking as our theme "Seeing God As He Is." First of all, an astounding sight; second, a wonderful transformation; and third, a sure confidence.

What an astounding sight we will behold. The text concludes with these climactic words, "for we shall see him as he is." We will see God. First of all, this is an astounding sight because we will see God. Verse 1 says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God," and then verse 2, the text, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he," God, "shall appear, we shall be like him," God, "for we shall see him," God, "as he is." God is God. God is not like anything else in the whole vast universe.

What is some glorious soul-enrapturing sight you have seen with your eyes? Maybe some glorious vista, some majestic snow-capped mountain with forests of trees and waterfalls and a calm pristine lake that reflects that mountain. Or maybe some sunset in which the sky was ablaze with hues of orange and purple and red, so scarcely you could take it in, it left you speechless, the glory of it all on the Western horizon. Or maybe a baby, the crown of the whole creation is the human being, maybe the most beautiful thing you've ever seen is a newborn baby, adorable. But all of these things are creatures. We are all creatures, things that are of the dust and of the earth, earthy. We shall see God. God who is the holy other one, the incomparable being. This universe is so vast, we in our galaxy, our whole galaxy is but a speck in the whole vast expanse of the universe. The universe is enormous and yet it cannot contain our great, immense, eternal, infinite God. God is God, infinitely glorious. No matter what you've ever seen in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters underneath the earth, you've never seen anything that can even begin to compare unto God.

What an astounding sight. In the second place, this is an astounding sight because we will see God who is invisible. God is not made, composed of matter, of visible flesh and blood as we are. God is invisible. John 1:18, "No man has seen God at any time." John 4:24, "God is a spirit." 1 Timothy 6:16, "who only hath immortality dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see." God is invisible. God says, "No one has seen me. No one can see me." And yet the God who cannot lie says to us in the text, "You shall see me," and we believe him. We believe him and are as excited as Job who said, "Though after my skin worms destroy my body, yet in my flesh I shall see God." The invisible God.

In the third place, this is an astounding sight because we will see God who is holy. 1 Timothy 6:16, "who only hath immortality dwelling in light which no man can approach

unto." God in all of his infinite holiness burns brighter than the noonday sun. God is light. And even as you cannot look at the sun or take a telescope to look very closely at the sun without having your eyeball burned, so no man, no sinner can approach unto the thrice-holy God without being consumed in body and soul. God is infinitely holy and yet we believe God when he teaches us in the text tonight that we shall see him, the holy God, and delight in him.

Fourth, this is an astounding sight because we will see, as the text explicitly states in its conclusion, we shall see God as he is. We don't always see things as they are. There may be the man or woman who sits very respectfully in the church seat and dresses very nicely but is a completely different person in private at home. We don't always see people for who they really are. And then there's the leader, the king, the president elevated in rank and dignity, how he really is and who he really is, and then our limited view of him from a distance. Or there are the mountains, and I think of where I used to live in Redlands, California, the wall of mountains to the north and to the east, a beautiful wall but often during the summertime the haze that hangs in the valley so that you can't always see the mountains as they are. Or there's the transitory sight as we're moving very quickly past something, or something like a comet shoots through the heavens very quickly past us. There it is as it really is but we don't always see it as it is.

But God, we shall see God as he is. We will not see him for all that he is as God, but we shall see him as he is. We will not see him for all that he is because he is God, and even when we are glorified, we are still finite creatures, we will never be able to take in all that God is. We will never be able to plumb the depths of his infinite wisdom and knowledge or scale the heights of his mercy which is as high above us as the heavens are above the earth, or fully search out the whole, the entirety of the being of the Triune God.

God is God and there is even something comforting in knowing that God is, though knowable, incomprehensible. I'm a very small man and you are very small, very, very small, and if we can fully take in all that God is, as it were, wrap our mind around who God is and fully search out the whole of the being of God, then God would have to be a very, very small God. I don't want a small God and you don't want a small God. Let God be God. We will never be able to see him for all he is but we will see him as he is with our limited, finite capacity and according to his self-disclosure, his revelation of himself. We will see him as he really is. His being will not be clouded. He will not be so lofty that he is forever mysteriously beyond our knowing, but he will show himself to us even as he does already but one day show himself to us more than he does now. No obstructions. And especially not this depraved flesh that cleaves to us. No obstructions of our view of God. Now we see through a glass darkly, now we look through the looking glass with many smudges and we don't see things exactly as they are. We do see God by faith but one day we shall see him as he is. And people of God, if we can say tonight with the Apostle John behold what manner of love that Father, the one who is for Jesus' sake our Father, hath bestowed upon us, what will we say when he takes us and draws us right into his very presence in the heights of heaven and shows us all of his love as the Father who loves us? We shall see him face-to-face, see him as he is.

An astounding sight. We shall see him when we see Jesus. Whatever difficulties are presented in the text, those difficulties are remedied by the person of Jesus Christ, the Savior. We shall see Jesus and seeing Jesus we shall see God as he is. That's the teaching of the text when we read in the text, "but we know that, when he shall appear," and when the text speaks of the future appearance of God, "when he shall appear," the text is speaking of God's appearance in the person of the Savior, Jesus, at his Second Coming. Back in chapter 2, verse 28, we read of Jesus, "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear," that is, the Savior, "we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." And now in the text when the text speaks of the appearance of God it's speaking of his appearance in the person of Jesus Christ at his Second Coming. When we see Jesus, we will see the Triune God.

Jesus, for Jesus is God, that's the truth that underlies the text. Jesus is fully God. Hebrews 1:3, he is the brightness of God's glory, he is the express image of God's person. To see me is not to see God. To see your husband or father is not to see God. To see the president is not to see God. To see Hoeksema or Calvin or Luther or Paul or Moses himself is not to see God. But to see Jesus is to see God. It is astounding that we will see the invisible God and we will when we see the glorified Son at his Second Coming. It is astounding that we will see and delight in the holy God. We will even as we do now through our mediator, Jesus Christ, when we see Jesus by whose imputed righteousness we have a right unto and we have a way unto the holy God so that we are not consumed as we are clothed in Christ's righteousness. In him we will see and delight in the holy God. It is astounding that we will see God as he is. We shall when we look upon Jesus in all of his glory at his Second Coming. We shall see God and forever see him as he is, as he really is.

Now doesn't that fill your heart with excitement tonight, that you will see Jesus? Sometimes I wonder what we think when we think of that fact, and I hope you don't think of Jesus as some, now that he's ascended into heaven, some mythical angelic figure who sort of hovers around in some ethereal world and one day we will see this, this figure. Fully God and our Savior is forever fully man. Now he's glorified, his humanity is glorified, but he is still man. He's visible. He has a face. He has eyes. He has a mouth. He has a body, the glorified Savior, and we will see him. Imagine that.

We will see him. Is it not the natural yearning of every human heart to be able to see the figure whom everyone is excited about? The one everyone is talking about? The loved one whom we have not seen for a long time? The great leader everyone rallies around? Anybody at a presidential rally would love to be able to move from the distant reaches right up under the podium to see the contours of the face and the color of his eyes, and the movement of his mouth, to be able to look right into his face, that great man. Or you think of Zacchaeus as the crowds were pressing, though he was a publican probably dressed very nicely, he didn't care about his dignity, he went scrambling and scurrying up that tree because he was very short, and though he heard, he wanted to be able to lay his eyes upon Jesus, just to be able to see him. So up into the tree he went to see.

We will see Jesus, the one who speaks to us every week in the Gospel, at whose feet we sit for instruction, the one whose name we confess every day in the world, the one whose name we use to conclude every single prayer we've ever offered from the time we were toddlers, we always say it, "In Jesus' name." We take his name upon our lips, the one whom we love more than anyone else. "I love Jesus more than I love my own spouse," says every believer. "No one is more important than Jesus. He means more to me than a thousand worlds." But we've never seen him. You've never looked into his face. The day is coming when you shall see him as he is. Not as he was. Not as an infant, as the wisemen saw. Not bleeding. Not sweating. Not despised and rejected as the disciples or the Centurions saw. But you will see Jesus as he is, crowned, arrayed in all of his matchless glory and honor, in his new resurrected body, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the one who loves you and who died for you. He's coming and at his Second Coming you will see him face-to-face and that will be the most blessed thing. That will cause us to have so much delight within us to be able to see him, all of these sorrows and troubles that burden you today, all these things, they won't matter anymore. All the things of this earthly life that can mean so much to us, they won't mean anything the moment that we see Jesus.

And when you see him, you will see God as he is, and this is the goal from all eternity. God elected unto the Lord Jesus Christ a people, chose a people to be the body of Christ, and redeems that people through Jesus Christ so that that people, that innumerable throng might one day be taken up into the heights of heaven and all gathered before God for the beatific vision to be able to be gathered before God and to see the face of Jesus Christ forever and ever, and looking at Christ to be able to see the Triune God as he is, an astounding sight.

"For we shall see him as he is." The result of this astounding sight is a wonderful transformation. Now what we need to do in consideration of this wonderful transformation is consider, first of all, now. That's where the text begins, now. And then secondly, the wonderful transformation that will occur. And then thirdly, the connection between the wonderful transformation and the astounding sight.

We begin with the now. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Now we are the sons of God. From all eternity God has predestinated us unto the adoption of children. The blessed Savior came and through his suffering and death and resurrection, he obtained for us the right to be the sons of God. And the Holy Spirit has come irresistibly and sovereignly and cause us to be born again so that we are born out of the womb of sin and death and born into the family of God, and have the principle of holiness within us.

We are, now we are. Isn't this a lovely description, "now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." While we are tonight the sons of God, there is a glory that belongs to our sonship which has not yet been manifested, not yet been fully realized. It doth not yet appear. The apostle speaks of this also in verse 1 when he says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." We are

the sons of God but because the glory that belongs to us has not yet been fully realized, the world doesn't know us and the world looks at us and comes to the conclusion there really is no fundamental difference between the ungodly.

And those who say they are the sons of God, for we still have this corrupt flesh through which we sin, and just like the ungodly, we break commandments, we disrespect authority, we sin and we have to say, "Sorry. Sorry, I was wrong. Forgive me." We sin just like the ungodly. We sin. And just like the ungodly, we live in this old, frail, dust-framed body that is subject to all kinds of injuries, to all kinds of diseases. The sons of God can become statistics in the COVID-19 tally, the ungodly, this many, the sons of God, this many, because we are subject to contracting viruses. We get diseases. We get cancer. We have to stand in line at the drugstore to pick up a prescription drug that we've ordered. We go to the hospital. We lie in the hospital bed, the son of God right next to the ungodly. We die. We get packaged in a wooden box and lowered into the deep parts of the earth just like the ungodly. The earthquake comes and shake the earth, the tornado comes and rips through the city, the waters of the floods are lifted up, destroying the livelihood of the ungodly and the sons of God.

"Now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be." And so the ungodly mock and ridicule and scorn. There's nothing special about the sons of God. Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but when he shall appear, we shall be like him." There will be a wonderful transformation. We shall be like God. We shall not be equal to God. We will never be of the same essence as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, but in a creaturely way we will resemble God. We already do but later in the fullest sense, we will be like God when we are perfectly conformed in body and in soul to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our bodies, this old dust-framed body we have tonight, this very body, this body will be transformed and made like unto Christ's glorious resurrected body. It will become a body of power, a body of immortality, an incorruptible body of heavenly glory and honor that far surpasses the body that Adam had in paradise. No longer a body of sin. No longer will the members be used in the service of sin. A perfect glorified body. Philippians 3:21, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."

But not only that, animating this new heavenly immortal body will be a perfectly pure soul as God is pure, so that all the movements and the energies, the thoughts and the desires that arise out of and determine the behavior of us in the body will be perfectly pure as God is love, and as perfectly pure love, so our love for God and one another into all eternity will be perfectly pure. Every imagination of the thoughts of our heart will only be pure continually, world without end. Not even one stray thought, one sinful desire. A perfectly pure soul in a glorified, resurrected, heavenly body. We shall be conformed perfectly to the image of Christ and thus be like God in a creaturely way resembling our Father, children like their Father.

Now this glory, this wonderful transformation has not yet occurred in the fullest sense of the word, so the ungodly don't see this glory. Who has ever seen a glorified human being,

Christ excepted? Forty days after his resurrection he was appearing on the earth, but who among the ungodly has ever seen a son of God glorified with the glory of heaven? A perfect robe of righteousness? They've seen Joseph, very pious, very godly, lifted up in Egypt. They've seen Daniel in all of his faithfulness lifted up in Babylon. But who has ever seen a son of God adorned in the higher glory of heaven with a new resurrected body?

Now are we the sons of God but that glory that awaits us has not yet appeared, but we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him as the children of God, like God himself. What a gracious transformation that will be. Think about it. In the very beginning in our father and mother in the garden and through the instigation of the devil in pride and rebellion, we wanted to be like God. "Eat. Go ahead eat and ye shall be as God." And we did. And we fell. And God punishes and justly God could take the whole human race and cast every human being away from himself and into everlasting destruction in hell where his wrath abides forever. That would be perfectly just, but our God is so gracious to us that for the sake of Jesus Christ and through his suffering and death, God will not only redeem us through Christ but he will transform us and one day perfectly transform us so that we will be like him, children of their Father.

And this is so glorious that the apostle puts it in a rather unique way in the text, "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." He doesn't give all kinds of substance to it. It's nondescript. It's indefinite. He just says, "it doth not yet appear what, what we shall be." That's how glorious it is. It's what and what more can you say? We will be quite something. What is it? Well, we will be like God. How do you fully explain that and understand that? What. There it is, "what we shall be." Marvelous transformation.

And now we will be like God when we see him, and that's the importance of the little word "for." We shall be like him for we shall see him. The meaning is that our sight of Jesus at his Second Coming will be transforming. To see him is to be made like him, and here we have to go into the creation to understand this as best we can and that's by thinking of the moon which God has made. All by itself the moon is rather drab and homely, it's just a very ordinary object up in the heavens. There it is, the moon. But wait until the sun comes. Wait until the sun casts its brilliant rays at the moon. Wait until the sun shows its face to the moon, that is, wait until the moon sees the face of the sun and all of a sudden that object becomes a brilliant glorious pearl of great price in the heavens. Beautiful. And so it is with us.

Our glory has not yet appeared but wait until the Son of righteousness arises with healing in his wings, and on the last day manifest all of his heavenly glory and looks at us, we will be transformed. Not everyone will be transformed. Everyone will see him, every eye will see the Son, Jesus Christ, but not everyone is in him, not everyone is a son of God. Some will see him and weep and wail. But when Christ appears, we who are the children of the light, who are in Christ by grace, as soon as we see the glory of his face on the last great day, that very sight will be transforming so that seeing him we will be made like him, and therefore like God our Father.



Can you imagine that? Can you imagine the light, the brilliant light, the glory of that great day? Now the whole earth and world is so full of darkness and wickedness and death, but when Christ appears as the bright light and the innumerable throng of all of the elect whether they are dead and called forth out of the grave or whether they are alive at his coming, in a moment there will be, as it were, galaxies and galaxies of luminaries, all the elect, the innumerable throng of the elect, all of them looking at the face of the bright light of Jesus Christ and be glorified as he is glorified, and declared righteous in the final judgment, and ushered into the gates of righteousness into heaven to live with God forever and ever, seeing God as he is in the face of Christ, having been made like God by seeing the face of Christ, all of it redounding to the glory of God.

That's our hope, marvelous hope that God sets before us in the Scriptures tonight. We shall see him as he is. And of this hope we are very confident tonight with the confidence of faith. Through the wonderful gift of faith we say we know, no uncertainty here, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that," we know. There's a great deal we don't know about the future, about the way home from church, about tonight. We don't know. May God bring you all home in safety and may God give you all a good night of sleep. We don't know what the night will hold and we don't know what the rest of this month will hold, and the rest of this year, and what will happen with the ballots and all the maneuvering and who will become the leader of this country, and where the virus will go, and what people will do in response to it. We don't know. We know it will get darker and darker but we don't know all of the details. But I know something and you know something with the full persuasion of faith according to the wonderful revelation of God, this we know, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.

We know that. We are so certain and confident because we are the beloved of God, and that's where the apostle begins, "Beloved." Beloved. We are the beloved of God. God would never put a light in front of us and then take it away. God who loves us and has loved us eternally for Jesus' sake, he will never set before us in all of our darkness a hope and then have that hope somehow shame us or disappoint us. He loves us. Beloved. Not everyone is beloved. Some are his enemies, "Woe to the enemies of God." We are his beloved. He announced that at the outset of the service, beloved. And now in the text, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know," with the full persuasion of faith, that "he shall appear," and when he appears he will transform us and "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Amen.

Let us pray.

*Father in heaven, we know according to the Scriptures what the response to this word ought to be and now we pray that thou will cause it to be by thy Holy Spirit, and that is that we purify ourselves even as thou art pure. So holy God of light, sanctify us by the Holy Spirit that we may be pure and pursue purity all the way to the end even as thou art pure, for every man that has this hope we considered tonight in him, does purify himself even as thou art pure. Grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.*