

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

March 20, 2022

We Will Be Like Him

1 John Part 14

Prayer: *Father, again we just again thank you for gathering us together as you have, for the fact that we still have this freedom and we still have your gift of your word. We pray, Lord, as we open up that word that we would have the gift of your Holy Spirit, guide us, accompany us and give us the ability to not just understand what is being said but to make it of permanent value. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well last week we discovered that God has a problem and it has to do with his holiness, with his other-ness, the fact that God is not remotely like anything else in this universe. God said in *Isaiah 40: To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?* knowing that there's no other entity with which we can compare in power and wisdom and all the other attributes that he has. We look at the stars that he's spoken into existence and seen that they comprise a number that's so unspeakably huge, it's literally unpronounceable. We find that more often than not God is simply indescribable. And that also applies to his love.

We left off last week with this open-ended kind of indescribable way of describing God's love for us by saying: *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!* God isn't bothering to enumerate the different ways that he loves us because like the stars in the sky, there's just too many and counting them all becomes unworkably indescribable. Really all God can do is say to us "*behold.*" He's essentially saying here is my love for you demonstrated in the birth of my Son in his perfect life, in the cross, in his death, in his resurrection. Hebrews tells us that in times past God spoke to us through his creation through the prophets, but now he has spoken to us through his Son. Jesus is God's final word to us and it is a word that will take all of eternity to unpack.

So God tells us that his love for us through the cross has enabled him to not simply open up heaven and let us kind of slink in but instead he proudly declares that we are his children, that our debt has been paid in full by his Son and that we are now co-heirs with Christ, brothers and sisters of Jesus. And this is the good news that the world really hates to hear. I mean I pointed out last time this world is divided into two warring camps: there's the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and the vast majority of this world sits blinded by the god of this world, not the least bit aware of the battle raging but firmly committed to this world's

view of reality. And over against that view are the children of God who have been given the Holy Spirit of truth who is able to point them to reality. I mean any child of God has been given that spirit of truth has been also given the ability to cast off the blindness that the god of this world has kept him in to see reality perhaps for the very first time. God says, behold, they're new creatures in Christ no longer beholden to the blind ways of the world. God's children enter into a brand new relationship with the world, one that the world does not take too kindly to. And Jesus warned us that the world doesn't take kindly to those who refuse to play by its rules, and this is what John was saying when he put it this way, he said: *Therefore the world does not know us because it did not know him.* And that's the bad news that accompanies the good news.

What follows though in our text this morning is an astounding display of even more good news with regards to what is in store for us as children of God. This is *1 John 3:1-3*. John says: *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Well, John tells us once again that becoming a child of God is not

a future event but one that happens right here and right now. I mean, you may physically look the same to outsiders because the primary change that has taken place is within you, it's within your spirit as the Holy Spirit of truth enters in you once you become a child of God, but that's just the beginning. John acknowledges that precisely how this new son ship is going to unfold is still future, as John says, *it has not yet been revealed*. But he tells us one incredibly important fact about this new life and this new appearance that it will consist of. It says we shall be like the resurrected Christ. *"When he is revealed we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is."*

Well, John's telling us three things about our new status as children of God. Number one, he's telling us that right now, right now we are children of God. *Beloved, now we are children of God*. And we touched on this the last time, what an incredible privilege this is, how costly it was to God himself, how Father, Son and Holy Spirit went through profound agony in order to satisfy the justice of God's perfect holiness and still bring us to him as his children. The father was the vineyard owner. He was the one watching the vineyard workers beat and slaughter the servants, not once, not twice, but repeatedly. He's the one who sent his Son saying surely they're going to respect my Son only to see them identify his Son as the heir and slaughter him. The Son we saw as

the willing sacrifice who gave up heaven itself to take on flesh, live a perfect life, and then offer that life up on a cross. The Spirit, God says, was the very agent through which Jesus became flesh as an angel tells Mary in *Luke 1*: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*" And so we pointed out that God went through the agony on the cross so that he could boldly declare his love for us by making us his children. We don't slink into heaven. And we find God the Father celebrating our arrival there. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!*

Secondly John says, *we shall see him as he is*. I have to be honest here, I mean, John is telling us something I doubt very much that we have even an inkling of what he's talking about. John tells us Jesus will be revealed, we shall see him as he is. But what Jesus is he referring to? Well, it's the real Jesus, it's the Jesus who actually lines up with reality and for many of us that's probably going to come as a shock. So much of our understanding of heaven and therefore our understanding of what's in store for us when we get there as children of God is based on a faulty understanding of scripture or no understanding at all. I think if you were to ask most people, what is Jesus like, I mean, sort of physically

descriptive wise, what's he like? People would have no idea. They'd shrug their shoulders not knowing whether this Jesus was spirit or flesh or some kind of combination of the two. There's a lot of mystery there. We know Jesus left us breaking the laws of physics by ascending in a cloud and that he's going to return in the very same way. *Acts 1:9* says: *Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."* So we know that. We also know that before he ascended he appears to Mary Magdalene. She had no idea who he was. And then he appeared on the road to Emmaus to Cleopas and his friend and they too couldn't recognize him. We know that he suddenly materialized in a room that had a locked door, so somehow or other he had the power to materialize and dematerialize. But then he immediately rebuked Thomas's lack of faith by pointing out that he's as real a person of flesh and blood as anybody else. This is *John 20:26*. It says: *And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand*

here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus also demonstrated his physical resurrection by cooking his disciples breakfast. They were laboring all night trying to catch some fish; came up with nothing. This is *John 21:12*. It says: *Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?" -- knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.* Well, now it's pretty hard for a spirit to start a fire and to cook fish and to serve breakfast, and Jesus did all of that; he did that to demonstrate that he's real flesh and real blood. I think the Bible is quite clear that the Jesus who John says will be revealed is the same Jesus who stepped out of that tomb, and he did so with a resurrected body of flesh and blood that could do extraordinary things. Well that's a revelation to lots of folks, I mean, they think that the Jesus who ascended into heaven was this ghost-like spirit; he was not. The body that stepped out of the tomb is the body that's been revealed, and just like us, it consists of real

flesh and real blood. I mean, Jesus right here, right now somewhere is in the universe in flesh and blood.

I mean the astounding thing about the incarnation is that when God took on flesh he didn't do it temporarily. He didn't say, okay, this is a 33-year journey for me. He so identified with us and he so loved the world, that when he became one of us, he did so permanently. And when John says we shall see him as he is, John means at the very least, we shall see Jesus as a flesh and blood person instead of a specter or a spirit. It was the ancient Greeks who thought that spirit was everything but it was unfortunately housed in flesh. John was constantly dealing with the gnostic heresies that all centered around the idea that flesh is temporary and limiting and spirit is eternal once it's liberated from the flesh. Well, the gospel insists that personhood consists not just of spirit or flesh but both spirit and flesh. Jesus represented the perfect expression of spirit and flesh. And if we're ever going to understand how we will be like Jesus, we have to understand the importance of realizing the bodily resurrection of the dead. Paul put it very succinctly in *1 Corinthians 15*. He said: *For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of*

all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

You know, rising bodily from the dead used to be the definition of the word "resurrection," and today unfortunately you have to say, well, that's not necessarily so. I mean, I mentioned before what someone referred to as this term "word theft." Word theft is taking a known word and using it in a context that makes people think you're using it properly when in fact you've stolen the word and re appropriated it for your own use. And such is the case with the word "resurrection." I mentioned before Richard Rohr's idea of resurrection is any change in any form from one form to another. So if you go from being a live body to a dead corpse, you have in Rohr's view become somebody who's undergone resurrection. See, words no longer mean what they used to mean. And therefore it's critically important that we understand exactly what we're talking about when we speak about the bodily resurrection of the dead because this is what John was after, this is what he was after when he told us that we would have the privilege of sharing the same kind of resurrection body that Jesus had.

The first idea I think that needs to get cleaned up about Jesus' revelation of himself is the idea that somehow or other spirit is a higher or better state than flesh. Jesus belies that fact. I

mean, understand when God created the physical world, after he had completed all of that, he declared that it was good. But when he finished creating us, *Genesis 1:31* says: *God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.* The very good of creation was us, body and soul.

Randy Alcorn in his book *Heaven* says this, he says: "Genesis 2.7 says, 'The Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.' The Hebrew word for 'living being' is *nephesh*, often translated 'soul.' The point at which Adam had become *nephesh* is when God joined his body (dust) and spirit (breath) together. Adam was not a living human being until he had both material (physical) and immaterial (spiritual) components. Thus, the essence of humanity is not just spirit, but spirit joined with body. Your body does not merely house the real you, it is as much a part of who you are as your spirit is."

See, the fall represented the kingdom of darkness's victory in destroying this perfect blend of spirit and flesh whom God called Adam. You see Adam's sin split us into creatures that were divided in spirit and flesh, unlike what we were supposed to be. And when Adam ate that forbidden fruit, his spirit died immediately while his flesh took literally hundreds of years to die. If you remember

Jesus and he's praying in the garden of Gethsemane and his disciples fall asleep, and there he points to the two parts that we had now become instead of one when he says, "*The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.*" And what we don't fully realize is the importance of both. You know, people make the mistake of thinking that heaven's reality is closer to some type of fairy tale spirit experience where at worst people are just kind of sitting like angels on clouds playing harps, or at best just enjoying a celestial version of Disney World where everything is free and amazing. Every one of us, we all carry false information, much of it gleaned when we were children. I mean I still have vivid memories of the panic I felt when I was in third or fourth grade in Catholic school and the nuns told me about what they had called "the beatific vision." They said we were going to spend all of eternity in silent ecstasy staring at Jesus. News flash: Not a good idea to tell fourth graders that. I mean, for a kid in the fourth grade that's not a description of heaven at all; it's a lot closer in my mind to the other place. I had no understanding whatsoever of the beatific vision which is actually something worth considering.

When Job was in the throes of his hideous disaster that had become his life, he kept his hope alive by clinging to his hope for the future, and it wasn't Disneyland. Do you know what it was? It was

seeing the face of God. *Job 19*, he says: *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God.* There's so much here that Job reveals about the hope that John is describing. Notice Job says, *"in my flesh I will see God,"* he's talking about resurrection, about a bodily resurrection where Job is standing not on some cloud in some ethereal heaven but where's he standing? Well he's standing on the very planet that I'm speaking to you from that's going to be redeemed as well. I mean Job says, *"For I know that my redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth."* Did you know that this planet's going to be fully redeemed and that heaven itself will one day be right here on earth? Who could have imagined that Port Jervis would be part of heaven at some point?

I mean so how's that going to happen? I mean what's going to happen to the earth? Is it going to be wiped out? Is it going to be destroyed? Well, the answer to that is actually yes and no. This is what God says in *2 Peter 3*, he says: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and*

godliness. Well, from thousands of years ago it sounds a lot like Peter's describing a thermonuclear event except much, much worse. I mean, it's almost like God is saying, "I'm going to wipe the slate clean; I'm going to redo it all over again." *Revelation 21* says: *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.* Then God goes on to say in *Revelation 22*: *And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face.* Well there's that beatific vision once again. And then we find David in *Psalms 27* saying this, he says: *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.*

So I read that scripture and I get it now, I see why the nuns thought it meant staring in ecstasy at Jesus' face and that may be closer to the truth than I realized. We have Jesus himself holding out this promise to those who are pure in heart. In *Matthew 5* he says: *"Blessed are the pure in heart" -- for what? -- "for they shall see God."*

So what is God trying to communicate here about this great joy that we're going to experience in heaven, something that I found

frighteningly bad as a fourth grader? Well, what if I told you that the peak human experience, the source of our deepest joy and greatest pleasure is not sex, it's not obtaining great wealth or eating great food or living in great real estate. Think of anything you can that would constitute your idea of a peak human experience, insert it in the definition and none of it will come close to just seeing the face of God. I mean for a little kid in the fourth grade, this was a cross between terror and boredom. I mean staring at Jesus for eternity, sorry, no thanks. But understand what God is trying to communicate here. I mean, it's not like God doesn't know what he's talking about here. I mean God is the designer of everything that lives. He made eagles want to fly, he made fish want to swim, he made lions want to roar and cattle want to graze, and they all do what God intended them to do not because they have to but because they want to because that's the way God made them. And at the very top of God's creation is this one creature who bears the image of God himself and that is us, that's us human beings. God also made them with great intent and purpose. And he designed them for one thing primarily and the thing that he designed them for was worship.

It was C.S. Lewis who pointed out what is absolutely unique about human beings and it's a reflection of precisely what we were designed for. Lewis pointed out that human beings don't experience

the peak joy of anything unless they can express that joy through praise. Here's how he put it in his book *Reflection on the Psalms*. Lewis said: "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed. If it were possible for a created soul to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude. It is along these lines that I find it easiest to understand the Christian doctrine that 'Heaven' is a state in which angels now, and men hereafter, are perpetually employed in praising God. To see what the doctrine really means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God-drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression. The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is 'to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.' But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him."

Folks, there's no other creature on the face of this planet that's

designed like that. Now I've used this example over and over again, so forgive me for going back to the same old well. But going to the finest restaurant and eating the greatest meal you've ever been served is diminished completely by the thought of eating it by yourself. Just think about that, I mean, deny yourself the ability to say something as simple as, "isn't this amazing" and suddenly the joy of that meal is not so great. And that's also what marks us as different from the animals, I mean, I don't care how wise or thoughtful your dog may be, I guarantee you, if you give him his greatest meal, the first thing he's going to want to do is find the solitude that's going to allow him to consume it all by himself. The last thing on his mind would be sharing or even praising it with his fellow dogs. That's one great difference between the animal kingdom and human beings, our joy is completed by praising something glorious, because we were made for praise and worship.

So again I want to repeat an example I gave, I gave this, I think it was seven years ago, I just want to repeat it. It was seven years ago, because it's so apt. One afternoon I was watching the Giants against the Cowboys, and during that game which the Giants lost as they almost always do, one of the players Odell Beckham made a catch that was so spectacular that it was referred to as "the catch." I've shared this once before but you really have to

see it to what I'm getting at. Pay attention to what the announcers say.

Reuben, if you just run that. It's just a picture of a guy catching a football, but listen to what they say. I guess you're not going to listen to what they say.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxbz3DDQzHU>)

That statement "wow," that's what we call on a secular level an overflow of praise. They have no ability to not do that. They could say well, the following blue just caught the ball and they got six points. He's not going to do that because that's not the way we're built.

So why are we looking at a football player making a catch in a sermon? Well, at the same time that this game took place, my kids were scattered all around the country; many of them were living in Colorado. This game was nationally broadcast so no sooner had the catch was made within the next 15 minutes or so, my phone rang three times and it was three of my kids calling with one question. Pick up the phone, "Did you see that catch?" Okay. Now why do you think they called me? I mean, were they informing me that a catch had been made at a football game and I need to know that? No, of

course not. They knew I was watching the game. Did they call to give me any more information? No. Did they call me to share and complete the pleasure of watching something glorious, and yes, even a football catch can be glorious? That all goes to illustrate how we were designed. My boys and one daughter that sits right over there, their pleasure in that catch was enhanced and completed by being able to share it, because we are designed for praise. Now elevate the source of that praise. It's not a football catch, it's not a sunset, it's not a meal, it's the King of glory who has stepped into flesh and you because you are now sons and daughters of this King have the privilege of experiencing -- quote -- *Christ who has risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.* I mean the author of glory itself, the one who designed us to react and respond to glory with pleasure is now the endless source of that pleasure. Well there's no way on earth that a kid in fourth grade could ever begin to grasp that, but again I go back to David in what he was grasping when he said this: *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.* You see, for all of eternity God's going to be growing in you the capacity to experience and express the joy of his glory more and more.

John Piper likes to say God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, and what he is saying is exactly true. Worshiping God is the greatest joy a human being will ever experience. And I know, I understand it's a hard sell today. That's a hard sell here and now today and Adam has a lot to do with that. See, we were not originally designed to be fallen creatures that were fleeing from God hiding behind fig leaves. But I'm also talking about the world here. What about those who are not of the world? What about those who have been privileged to be called children of God? These are folks who by the grace of God have had their sin debt paid for at the cross and they now stand worthy to enter heaven. These are the folks that John is talking about. This is what he says, he says: *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

And again, three things he's saying there, he says, number one, right now we are children of God; number two, we alone will have the privilege of seeing him as he really is in all of his glory; and number three, which is absolutely amazing, he says we shall be like Him. We talk about *Romans 8:28* all the time: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to*

those who are the called according to His purpose. But then God tells us exactly what his purpose is in the very next verse. He says: For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. What God is saying there, he said he's chosen us as sons and daughters to have the privilege of having everything in their life, every single event, the good, the bad and the ugly all working towards one telos or purpose, and that purpose is being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. Just think about that. I mean God has designed every event in your life to suit and prepare you for an eternity in which you will represent a unique expression of the image of Christ. Each of us will express the glory of Christ in a way that is as unique as your DNA. Paul so thoroughly understood that that he was able to take the stunningly awful things that happened in his life and put them into an eternal perspective that gave him a split screen vision of heaven and earth that enabled him to say: For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Well that same power is available to us provided we have the same perspective. You see, your transformed life began the process of sanctification the moment that you were saved, and it's an ongoing

never-ending process. It's what you will be bringing with you to heaven. It's what God will be growing in you for all eternity. He says: *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* John is telling us that Jesus will be revealing himself in that we will be like him, *"transformed into the same image from glory to glory just as by the spirit of the Lord."* It's amazing.

I mean, if I were to ask you what is your deepest need? What's your highest aspiration? What's the greatest joy you could ever anticipate? I doubt anyone would say what John is saying here. Again I think we have Adam to thank for that. I mean sin has so diminished our capacity to even imagine what God has in store for us. But listen to what God says. He says: *But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."* Once again, realize God cannot describe what will take place because we don't have the capacity to receive it. He can only describe the process. And he describes it as something that no one has ever seen or heard or imagined, but then John adds this statement at the very end, he says: *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* What he's saying is if Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior you have this incredible future ahead of

you. It's one that Cynthia and Ashley and Budd and Cindy are enjoying right now, and it's one that God wants us to put our hope in.

I can't think of a time when this world seemed more out of kilter and less inclined to care than today. Frankly, I see persecution coming right around the corner. And God is beckoning us to fall in love with what matters and out of love with all that doesn't, and becoming more like Jesus is all that matters. And focusing on that goal will give us the ability to truly believe that all things do work together for good. In the same way that God has a love for us that's so indescribably huge that he can say no more than "*behold*" as he puts it on display, so too when John describes for us the privilege of being children of God, all he can do is describe the process. He says Jesus will be revealed, "*We will see him he is, we will be like him.*" Let's pray.

Father, I just, I can't wait for what you have unfolding for us, for the incredible future that lies before us. I just pray, Lord, that you would give us the ability like Paul had, to have that split screen vision of eternity and this world right here and right now so that we can handle everything that this life throws us, knowing it's all in preparation for that great day, when Jesus will be revealed, when we will see him as he is and we will be like him.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.