

**THE HOPE OF GOD'S CHILDREN**

1 John 3:1-3

**Intro:** Up to this point in this First Epistle of John, the Apostle has been giving us certain tests which we need to apply to our lives to be sure that we have eternal life. Several times in my ministry I have had people rebuke me for teaching that it is possible to be sure that we are saved, and that we won't know it until we die. To them it seems to be a matter of pride to be able to say with the Apostle Paul,

. . . I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

But Paul did not say that boasting about what he could do for his own salvation. He was boasting in what God would do for him. Usually the people who don't like the words of Paul, or of the Apostle John, with reference to the eternal nature of our salvation, are the people who believe that you can get in and out of salvation, that you can be saved today and lost again tomorrow. That is not the kind of salvation that any of the writers of Scripture were teaching. They taught a salvation that is eternal, and it is eternal because it is a work of God. The words of our Lord Jesus Christ in a familiar verse like John 3:16 speak of the eternal nature of salvation. (Quote John 3:16.)

Now we all know people who have made a profession of faith, and who have acted like they were Christians for a time, but then something happens and they fall away from the church and live like people who have never claimed to be Christians. In fact, the Apostle John has given us a verse which describes people like that. Look back to chapter 2, and verse 19. (Read it.)

Judas Iscariot was a person like that. When the Lord announced to the twelve that one of them would betray Him, not one of them said, "I know who it is. I have been suspicious all along that Judas was a phony." Judas may have been deceived about himself, but when he realized that the Lord was not going to set up His kingdom on earth at that time, and he learned of an opportunity to make some money if he would betray the Lord into the hands of His enemies. And that is what he did!

This is one thing that worries me about people who go forward in evangelistic meetings, thinking that that is what makes a person a child of God. And as time goes on it becomes evident that more are not saved

than those who are. And those who aren't are the kind who say, "I tried to be a Christian, but it didn't work for me!" Trying to be a Christian is not how you become a Christian. People are saved when they believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He died to save sinners from their sins. When our faith is in Christ, when we believe in Him, that is how we are saved. We all fail the Lord. It is still possible for a Christian to sin. But a Christian is not going to live in sin. At salvation he became a child of God, and his life is going to demonstrate that he has been saved because he will live a new life, a life of obedience to God's Word.

In the one chapter of Jude which is the next to the last book of the Bible, we find two verses which help us with the assurance of our salvation:

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 24-25).

You see, God and Christ and the Holy Spirit get the glory for our salvation because They save us without any help from us.

The Apostle John would never have written this epistle that we have been studying if he had not believed that we can know that we are saved, and that we can know that we are saved *eternally!* But he wants us to be sure! That is where these tests are so very important. Shall I repeat them for you again? I will be happy to do so. Here they are:

- 1) The test of sin.
- 2) The test of obedience to the Word of God.
- 3) The test of love for the people of God.
- 4) The test of worldliness.
- 5) The test of correct doctrine.
- 6) The test of a relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Read 1 John until you understand these tests, and then evaluate your own life in the light of these tests. Remember that none of us has a perfect record as a Christian, but if we are saved, we have a new life, and our daily living is going to show that we belong to the Lord.

Now, as we come to chapter 3 it is apparent that the Apostle John has reached a mountain peak of truth. Perhaps it was that coming to the end of what in our Bibles is chapter 2, and moving on into chapter 3, he wants to make as sure as he can that his readers are with him. Perhaps as he mentioned abiding in Christ, his mind was taken back over some sixty

years when the Lord Jesus spoke to the apostles about the gift of the Holy Spirit and how His teaching, the Spirit's teaching, would exalt Christ and lead to a life of abiding in Christ. And he was again overwhelmed in his own heart because of the Gospel.

The word "Behold" is a command, and it could be translated, "See." And "see" in a context like this means that he wanted his readers *to understand, to get a clear understanding of the verbal picture he had given them of what it means to be a child of God.* He was not speaking of a vision of some kind, but he wanted them to see with their minds and with their hearts the significance of what he had been teaching them. And the word "behold" in Greek is plural so it means that he was addressing all of them and he wanted all of them to "see" what he had written. So let each one of us take this command as being addressed to us. "Behold!"

When I think of this word "behold" I am reminded of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 18, where he told the Corinthian believers what it means that we are *to look, to see.* This is what Paul said:

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

When we read our Bibles, we are looking at things that are not seen, that is, not seen with our natural eyes. We are seeing the things of God. We are learning spiritual truth. Paul was actually talking about the way the Corinthians were suffering for their faith, and he indicated that this was the way the Lord was teaching them to look away from the seen to the unseen, from their circumstances to the God Who was in control of their circumstances. So this is what we want to do this morning. You may be going through some trial or testing, and as you look at what you are going through, you may feel a sense of hopelessness. Or it may be that you are just confused by it all.

I was talking to a man recently who had been going through various kinds of trials, and he told me that the only way he could find peace was to realize that God was right in the center of everything that was going on in his life. Where did he learn that? From this Book. He was looking at things that are unseen. He was seeing God on the pages of Scripture, and applying what he was seeing to his own life.

If you look at the three verses of our text for this morning, I think you will

see that the Apostle John was asking his readers to look at the past in verse 1. Then in the first statement of verse 2 he was asking them to look at the present. Then in the rest of verse 2 he was asking them to look into the future. And in verse 3 he told them in one statement how you can identify a person who is really in the family of God.

Now let us look with the Apostle John's words with the help of the Holy Spirit until we see what he was seeing. He had had a long life, but it had not been an easy life. People are living longer today, but the added years are not what the earlier years have been. So the Apostle John was preparing to tell his readers (and us) what he had seen, or learned, by the help of the Holy Spirit, and he is trusting that the Holy Spirit will teach us what he had learned.

All right, first

### **I. THE PAST (1 John 3:1).**

One way we can define a Christian is that he, or she, is a person who loves God. If I were to ask all of you who love God to hold up your hand, I am sure that most of you would hold us your hand. It would make me very happy if everyone here could honestly raise a hand.

But that is not what the Apostle John was talking about. He was not talking about our love for God, but he was talking about God's love for us. And he was marveling at the character of the Father's love for us. And I believe that if we are to get the point of what the Apostle John was saying, we have to think first of all of "the Father," and then we have to think about "us." But then each of us has to change that "us" to "me." What kind of God is our heavenly Father that He would set His love upon me? This is a family question, isn't it? God is not the heavenly Father of everybody; He is just the Father of His children. And you are not in His family until you have been born into His family – born again, born from above, into the family of God.

Now if you were to make a list of all the reasons you can think of as to why God should love you, how long would your list be? If I were to do the same, how long would my list be? Let me tell you what your list would be like, and what my list would be like. If we were perfectly honest, there isn't a person in this room, nor any Christian on the face of the earth, who could come up with one reason as to why God should love

any of us. Paul said in Romans 5 that “God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” What is there about any sinner that would cause a holy God to love him, or her? Absolutely nothing. You see, the reason that God loved us and Christ died for us, is not to be found in us; it is to be found in the heart of God. There is not a single thing in you or in me that explains why God sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins and to save us.

But let me add to the mystery. God could have saved us without bringing us into His family. But the Apostle John added this part to the unsolved mystery as to why God would love us: He has brought all of us totally unworthy sinners into His family, and He loves for us to call Him, “Father.” We need to think a lot about 1 John 3:1.

But now let us go on to verse 2a.

## **II. THE PRESENT (1 John 3:2a).**

What about those people who say that we can’t know that we are saved until we die? Have they ever read the first part of verse 2? “Beloved, now are we the children of God.” “Now,” not tomorrow, nor not until we die, but “Now.” We may not always act like it. And we may not always talk like it. But the fact remains that right now and forever we are the children of God. You may not always feel like it, but if you are trusting in Christ as your Savior, you need to know that you have been born into the family of God – this is what you are right now. Believe it, and rejoice in it. If you ever doubt it, come back and read this verse again. Look at it, and look at it, and look at it, until you see it. This statement will be waiting right here for you if your faith ever falters.

But what about the future?

## **III. THE FUTURE (1 John 3:2b).**

If one part of this text is better than another, then this is the best. We need to pay a lot of attention to what the Apostle John said here. The first thing that he said was this: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” The Bible tells us many things, things that we would never know if God had not put them in His Word. God had many special reasons for saving us. But you can look at any of us who are in the family of God, and you would never realize from what you see now, what we are going to be like

when the Lord's work in our hearts is finished.

I have mentioned before in my messages a servant of the Lord who meant a great deal to me in my own walk with the Lord. I am speaking of Dr. T. J. Bach, who was the Director of The Evangelical Alliance Mission, which was called TEAM. He said that one day he went by a building that was being built, and the contractor had put a sign out in front of the part that had been constructed. The sign said this:

Under construction

Open for observation

But don't pass judgment until the job is finished.

As Dr. Bach read the sign, he said to himself, "That is a Christian – under construction, open for observation, but don't pass judgment until the job is finished." The Apostle John's version of that is, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Look at any Christian and you can't possibly imagine what he or she is going to be like when the Lord finishes the job.

But what do we know? We know three things:

- 1) "We know that when He shall appear." We know that the Lord is coming back for the family of God, also called the Church.
- 2) We also know that at that time His work in us will be completed, and "we shall be like Him." Would you have possibly thought of such an exalted purpose in our salvation? We are going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. You and I were deserving of eternal judgment, a place in hell for all eternity. Instead it is God's purpose to make all of us like His Son.
- 3) "We shall see Him as He is." And the Apostle Paul said by revelation that it will be "face to face."

In the light of all of this, we know that *the best is yet to be*.

We don't know when the Lord is coming, but we do know that He is coming. It might be today. The Father knows when it will be. Are you ready? I am going to show you in just a moment what you will be doing if you are ready. But I am asking you now, do you *know* that you are ready. Are you trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Savior? The Bible tells us in Romans 10:9 and 10,

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

Now I have come to the last verse of my text for today: 1 John 3:3. In this verse John was not actually telling those who are in God's family what they need to be doing (although this is involved in his words). But he was telling them

#### **IV. HOW TO IDENTIFY ONE OF GOD'S FAMILY MEMBERS (1 John 3:3).**

The Apostle John had just been describing our "hope." This is a word that often describes some future expectation, but not necessarily a hope that is certain. However, John uses it of the event which he had just described in verse 2. It is a future expectation that is absolutely certain, and it is secured by the promise of God, by the Word of God. We don't know *when the Lord is coming*, but *we know that He is coming*. And as the members of God's family on earth await the return of the Lord, what are they doing?

Using the title of one of Jerry Bridges' books, they are in *The Pursuit of Holiness*. The Apostle Peter stated it this way:

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Peter 1:14-16).

Where are those words written which Peter was quoting? They are found in Leviticus 11:44. So it is God's purpose that all of His people, show that they are His people, but seeking to grow in God's likeness, and in Christ's likeness, by doing those things that produce holiness of character and holiness of life.

What does this include for us? Bible reading. Prayer. Obedience to God's Word. Regular attendance with other members of God's family at a church where the Word of God is faithfully taught.

**Concl:** Remember the key word in this passage: "Behold." Don't let a day go by with taking special time to look into the Word, to see what God wants us to see that ultimately we might experience more and more that transformation of the Holy Spirit by which we become more like our blessed Savior.