

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE
That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7
Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to see you here this morning. Please turn in your Bibles to I John Chapter 3. We will actually deal with the first two verses above Chapter 3 and then a few verses in Chapter 3 this morning, and they are really powerful.

How many of you are done watching the news? Wow, every hand is up. I don't know about you but I don't get encouraged by watching the news anymore, or by reading the news, or however you want to consume any content about what is happening anywhere in the world today. Amen? (*Amen.*) The conversation that happens with almost every single person that I meet, whether they are a Christian or a non-Christian, whether they go to church or not, is that everyone feels like, '*What is going on?*' (*Amen.*)

And I think many times when we are experiencing events like the ones unfolding in our culture, in our nation and in our world today there is a sense of uncertainty where I think we want to come back to something that we know. We want to see some solutions. The thing that I think should bother us is not so much just that the world is screwed up, because we know the world is screwed up. We know there are problems all around us. We know that this is a world full of sinners, and we ourselves are just sinners saved by grace if we have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior. Sin and the problems and the brokenness of the world shouldn't surprise or scare us.

What really should scare is though is the solutions that people want to give for those problems. And one of the solutions we have to keep going back to over and over again, no matter what the problem is, whether it is personal, cultural, with our marriage or our kids, with our neighbors, or with our workplace, is to realize that one of the solutions to all of these problems is the love of God. The love of God is the solution.

And John knows this. We know that John wrote this letter about fifty years after Jesus' death and resurrection. He is now in the later years of his life, and he is writing this letter almost as if he knows he will soon be leaving this world. And he wants to make sure we understand something. He has said in the very first verses of this letter that he has seen, he has touched, and he has listened to Jesus. And he wants us to have the same experience with Him that he has had, and he believes that we can.

As this letter is unfolding, John is pointing out that people who say they are followers of Jesus, and yet they do this, they are not really followers. And we have been looking at the things the last few Sundays in Chapter 2 of how you can know if someone is truly a follower of Jesus or not. And now he is shifting his focus, his attention to people who really are followers of Jesus, and he is saying this: '*Moving forward, there is one way in which we know how to live like Him, how we can experience Jesus.*' And he wants more than anything for us to experience Jesus personally. He doesn't want us to be

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7 Ben Rudolph

something that is distant, but he wants us to be real inside of our own hearts and lives and to experience Jesus.

We just sang a song that has this idea of intimacy with Jesus, like John when he laid his head on the chest of Jesus during the Last Supper. And as John laid his head on Jesus' chest the book of John says he looked up at Jesus and he talked to Him. John wants us to have that kind of relationship with our Savior. And he knows in order for us to have this relationship we have to see Jesus' love for us. His love is what is going to drive everything.

The word 'love' is used over and over and over again in this letter. It is used four times in Chapters 1 and 2. The rest of the letter in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 the word love is used a total of twenty-seven times, in both verb and noun form. John is now shifting his attention to saying if we want to experience Jesus fully the way he has, it begins with understanding His love.

Now I want to unpack this a little bit so let's read Chapter 2 and verses 28 through Chapter 3 and verse 3. Now you know I always like to talk about chiasms every time I preach if I can find one. And there is one this morning we are going to look at. So see if you can pick it out. ***“And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of Him.”***

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are Gods' children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.”

This is an amazing passage, and the content of what John is talking about in every verse makes me feel like I could have taken a sermon a week on just one of these verses. It is so rich. It is so deep. Let's see if we can pick out this chiasm here. There are three major commands that John gives in this passage. You have the command to abide in Him. Then He talks about Jesus' appearing. And then it says we know Him and if we know Him we will practice righteousness. And there is another command in the middle to see what kind of love this is. He says the world doesn't know Him like we know Him, and what His appearing will mean for us who are in Him. And then there is the last command to purify ourselves.

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7 Ben Rudolph

We know this in the chiasm. I like to describe it like a sandwich, and the chiasm is the meat in a sandwich. We name a sandwich by what is in the middle of that sandwich. And in the middle of this chiasm is love. So what is the command that is given? I am not sure how many of you grew up going to church and used to read your 'King Jimmy.' But the King James version of the Bible translates verse 1 of Chapter 3 as this: "***Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us.***"

When I was a kid we sang a song in church about this verse. I am not going to sing it for you, but this idea of the word "***See***" in verse 1 of Chapter 3 means "***Behold.***" And this is a very intense verb, more than just, 'Hey, I want you to take a look at this,' okay? It means, 'I want you to really look at this. I want you to observe it. I want you to gaze at it. I want you to stare at it.' That is the kind of word that this word "***See***" means. That is why I like the King James Version of "***Behold***" much better because the idea of behold is so big. When I say, "***Behold***" to you, what are you thinking? You are probably thinking, 'Wow, this is big! This is something really big.'

One of my favorite pictures that I saw this past year was when a person was taking pictures of the way that cell phones have changed people. This person took a picture at a museum where all these kids were around these amazing works of art, just brilliant works of art, like those of Rembrandt and Monet. And all these kids are huddled around sitting on this bench in front of these beautiful priceless works of art and they are on their cell phones. They are looking at whatever was going on in Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or whatever. They were looking at something so much smaller even though they were surrounded by something as magnificent and beautiful as these priceless works of art.

And I think that is what we do today. We fail to "***Behold***" the love of God, and when we fail to see the love of God we miss out on what God is trying to tell us, teach us, and show us on how to live for Him. All the problems that we have, the relationship problems that we have in our marriages, the issues we have raising our kids, the interpersonal issues that we have in our workplaces, getting along with our neighbors, having the courage to share faith with people who need it, all of these issues, all of the problems, all of the things that we look at in our lives and say, 'I wish this could change,' they all begin with understanding and comprehending the love of God.

So when we look at this love what do we see? It says, "***Behold what kind of love the Father has given unto us.***" There is a 'kind' of love, and this is a type of love that is not just a normal everyday kind of love. Rather it is a unique love that is powerful. This is a love unlike any you will experience from any human being and it is only from the love of God. What kind of love is this?

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7 Ben Rudolph

We are going to look at three dimensions of this love this morning. It is going to be love that overcomes, love that amazes, and love that motivates. Let's look at the first love - the love that overcomes. Go back up to verse 28 where it says, "***And now, little children, abide in Him,***" And the word 'abide' means He wants us to enter into this, He wants us to rest in this, He wants us to embrace this, and He wants us to accept that we are to abide in Jesus. "***So that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming.***"

Now when you think about Jesus' return, when He comes back, what emotion do you feel? What is the emotion you feel? Now listen, the reason I ask that is because at certain points in our lives no matter where we are at today, sometimes that brings some emotions to us. There have been times in my life when I thought about Jesus coming back, and I was like, '*Oh no, I am not ready. I haven't been living right. I haven't been following Him. I have been doing my own thing.*'

And many times when it comes to thinking about Jesus' appearing we feel this word that John uses, which is "***shame.***" Just as when God entered the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve rebelled against Him, what did they do? They hid and they covered themselves. The idea of shame is the idea of having to cover ourselves. We know we have not been doing what we should be doing and we feel so ashamed of what we have done that we pull away from Jesus. See, when we think about Jesus coming back many times our instant emotion is to pull back because we know we are not doing right, we are not living right, there is something broken inside of us and we feel like a failure to God.

John tells us that God does not want us to feel shame. Now we feel shame because of things that we do, but notice John tells us we should not feel shame if we are in Him. If we are abiding in Him then we should not shrink back, and we should not feel shame. Shame is not motivated by love; it is not shaped by love.

I also want to say this - some of us when we think about Jesus' coming again we almost have this sense of relief because things are so screwed up and the world is so broken. And whether you feel like shrinking back in shame, or whether you feel like you want Jesus to come back because this place is crazy and you want to get out of it; both of those emotions are not rooted in love. So whether it is loving our neighbor or accepting the love of Jesus, John says the solution for all of this is to abide, to abide in Him, to trust in His love.

I love what was mentioned this morning from the stage about this idea of the gospel not just being for nonbelievers, but for believers as well. We need to fight every single day to rest in the love of Jesus. We have to fight that urge that says, '*Today I am going to earn it. Today I am going to prove it to you, God, that I am worthy of your*

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7 Ben Rudolph

love. If that is our attitude that we have to prove something to God, then the moment we fail, the moment we slip up, what do we do? We want to run and hide because we didn't carry our end of the bargain. And John says he wants us to abide in Him. Accept it, enter into it, and rest in His love.

If you left here this morning and someone said, *'Hey, for Father's Day someone who knows you and loves you just gave you a beach house.'* What would you think about that? First of all, we would want to know if it was really true. And so you check to be sure it is legit. Someone who knows and loves you, maybe someone from your family, is giving you this beach house. So you go online to Zillow, because that is what we do when we want to look to see what houses look like inside. So we go to Zillow and we look at all the rooms in this beach house and find out where it is located. And then we think, *'Man, this is awesome. This beach house is perfect and it is right on the beach. All the rooms look beautiful and here are the keys to this beach house.'*

Then what if you went to that beach house and you looked at it and thought, *'I didn't earn this. I haven't worked for it and I haven't done anything to deserve this.'* And you never went into the beach house because you felt like you had to do something to prove you were worthy of that wonderful gift. What would people think of you? *'Dude, take the keys and go inside the house and enjoy it. Sit on the back deck, walk on the beach and realize you have been given a great gift. Enjoy it!'*

How much more is the love of God. It is far greater because it is not just a temporal thing that we have been given. It is an eternal gift of love and acceptance. To abide in His love is an eternal gift. It is what He won for us on the cross and it transforms us. It overcomes our shame. It overcomes our pride. It overcomes our desire to prove ourselves to everyone around us as well as to God. God wants us to abide in His love, to walk in His love. He wants us to walk in the beautiful beach house and to enjoy it.

Have you done that lately? Have you recently spent some time resting in His love, abiding in His love? When you think about His coming again are you excited to see Him, to see your Savior? Are you excited to be able to see someone you love so dearly? And not just wanting relief to get out of this broken world, and not feeling like you need to get your life cleaned up before He comes. Like the teenager who messes up the house while his parents are gone and then frantically tries to clean it up before they get home. That is not the way God loves us and that is not the way God wants us to relate to Him.

So first we have a God whose love overcomes our shame. Next let's look at love that amazes. Look at verse 1 of Chapter 3 again. ***"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."*** One of the things that John wants us to do is to take a look at this love and to understand the kind of love

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7 Ben Rudolph

God has given to us. We are now called His children. We have been brought into His family. There is something new here. When we are in someone's family what does that mean? It means we are now part of a family and we have a new heritage, we have a new history.

We had a little graduation party last night for Jaden. It was just a small party for our family. And one of the things we love to do as a family is we tell stories. When you are part of a family your family tells stories when you all get together because there is a heritage and a history that you have been given. You have received it. Now some of you are like, *'Oh Ben, you don't understand my history. You don't understand my heritage.'* And the stories in my family are the ones we don't want to hear. But when you are a part of a family that is what it means.

Not only do we have a heritage and a history, but we have an identity. This is who we are, and we bear this name. This name represents the family that we are in. This is also true as a family of God. We now bear the name of Jesus and His name is now over us. His identity is now our identity. I think one of the things that is fascinating to me today is how we want to put people in groups and to label them. *'You are a part of this group.'* And we love these little groups. I even see these ads on television of Facebook groups that have been formed. Like a group of people who love basset hounds and they hang out at the beach. You can find your little niche or group of whatever you want to be a part of.

And there is this idea that sometimes we give these labels and group identities to say, *'This is who we are. This group defines us.'* But nothing should define us more than Jesus. Jesus should define our politics. He should define the way that we love one another. Everything that we do should be defined by Jesus. And this is what the world doesn't understand because look what it says in the last part of verse 1. ***"The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him."***

See, our lives should be so unique, so different, so filled with love and expressing that love, that people don't understand it. They can't comprehend it. No matter if you are with the political left or the political right, there is something about it that should make them feel uncomfortable, because Jesus makes everyone feel uncomfortable. Whether you are rich or poor, no matter what color your skin is, no matter what it is that people say about you, what should define you ultimately is that Jesus trumps it all. And what Jesus wants to do is He wants us to live our lives in such a way that no matter who we are around, no matter what group we may think we belong in, when we are around anyone they should be amazed by the love of God in us. They should be thinking that

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7 Ben Rudolph

there is something about us that they can't figure out, and it doesn't make sense to them. *'Why do you love people like that?'*

See that is the love that amazes the world. My own personal opinion is if we compare the Upper Room discourse, which is Jesus' final teachings to His disciples in John Chapter 13 through 17, with John's letter of I John, I think I John was written out of that. I think I John was written out of that teaching. So much of the language that is used in I John mirrors that section in the gospel of John.

You remember that Jesus said in the Upper Room, ***"This is how the world will know you are my disciples by the love you have for one another."*** See when you are a part of His family you have a new heritage and a new identity. And we also have a new intimacy, a new closeness with Him. We are now children of God.

I love seeing all the children in this room this morning. It is great. I am used to preaching to adults and I just love seeing kids here. And here is what I know about all you kids and that is that no one loves you more than your mom and dad. I can think you are pretty cool. I can say, *'Way to pay attention, guys. Good job listening this morning. I think you are well behaved.'* But no one is going to love you like your mom and dad.

Now parents, imagine God the Father looking down on us and seeing the way we love our kids to cuddle up with us, the way we love our kids to pursue us, even when they are hurt, or have done something wrong. And when we think about how flawed our love is, and how perfect His love is, realizing it is an amazing love should make us want to run to Him over and over and over again. This is the kind of love we have been given whether it is our history, whether it is our identity, whether it is our intimacy or even our inheritance.

See, in our earthly families one of those four categories is really broken. It is messed up. It is not perfect. It is dysfunctional. What is so beautiful is that we have been given an entry and an opportunity into a new family, and to let that define us. Let the love of God now define who we are. Are you mesmerized by the love you have been given? Or has your love grown cold? Have you not realized what it means to be called the child of God? It is the love that amazes.

Lastly let's look at love that motivates. John begins this last command saying this: ***"And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure."*** We are to purify ourselves, and purify sounds like a heavy word, doesn't it? That sounds pretty big. How do we purify ourselves? Well, in verse 2 it says: ***"Beloved, we are Gods' children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like him, because we shall see Him as He is."***

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE

That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7

Ben Rudolph

Here is what he is saying. When Jesus comes back the struggle, the turmoil will be over and we will be like Him. When Jesus brings us into His family He is not going to leave us the same. He is going to work in our lives and give us the Holy Spirit to transform us, to change us, to make us more like Him, to make us love like Him, and to help us every step of the way. And sometimes we feel discouraged because we don't think the progress of our lives have been changed at the speed or in the amount that we want. There are still struggles that we have, there are still addictions that we have, and there are still sins that we have. And when we look at all the problems in our lives we want to be different, we want to be more like Jesus, and we want to be changed. We need to pray for His help every day.

Here is the promise and the comfort - one day all the struggles will be gone. All the sin will be gone. Because when He appears we will be just like Him. The Bible gives this doctrine - the doctrine of glorification - which is the eradication of sin in our lives. And that is a promise God has given to us. Knowing that we have this promise is a guarantee of success. It is literally like someone offering us an opportunity to buy stock thirty years ago for Apple at one dollar a share. That's the kind of guarantee of success that is awaiting us. It is going to turn out well for all of us who know Him. So knowing that we need to understand what he means in verse 3 where he tells us to purify ourselves.

What does the second coming of Jesus and knowing that we will be just like Him someday have to do with the command to purify ourselves? Now the Bible talks about God purifying us, so what does this mean to purify ourselves? Here is the idea of purification, and I only have a couple more minutes to talk about this. But this is the deep theological perspective of purification. We find this all the time in the Old Testament and it is this idea of being clean and unclean. The concept of clean and unclean and purification has this in mind, this is what the Bible teaches; that sin affects all parts of us both spiritual and physical.

See, many times we just think that our sin affects our souls or our spirit, a spiritual dimension of who we are. But God is a God who has created matter, and the material world is just as important as the spiritual world to Him. When He talks about purifying and clean and unclean, what He is saying is that our sin affects our bodies and our souls the same way. We see this even in I Corinthians when Paul says that when a person commits sexual sins, he is committing a sin against his body. This idea of purification is that when anything is purified God wants us to take into account that our soul, our body and every part of us is involved.

This is a direct attack against the doctrine of Gnosticism that believes it is just about what happens on the inside of us, only what we do on the inside. And it doesn't

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7 Ben Rudolph

matter what we do in our body because there are two separate and distinct things. John is eradicating that idea and saying our bodies and our souls are intertwined and we can't do one thing in our body and another thing in our spirit that doesn't affect each other.

So John says to purify ourselves as He is pure. He is saying we should try to be like Him because we want to be like Him. Think of it like taking a shower every day. Now we all have kids and there is something special about kids because they can run around all day long, get sweaty and gross, and still not feel the need to take a shower. They are like, '*Why do I need to take a shower? I don't get it.*' Maybe their sense of smell hasn't developed yet, but kids can run around all day long and even though they are stinky and smelly they don't want to take a shower.

Now as an adult when I work all day in the yard I can't wait to take a shower. I want to feel clean and get this dirt and grime off of me. What is the difference? It is maturity. I love to feel clean. I want to get the dirt, grime and sweat off my body. And this is the motivation of love - I want to be clean like Jesus is clean. It is love that motivates. Not a love that has to prove anything; it is just for that guarantee of what is going to happen, so everything I do I want to work towards that end.

So love that overcomes, love that, amazes. and love that motivates. I want to leave us with three questions and then we are done. Are you in awe of God's love this morning? When is the last time that you just spent some time gazing, meditating, staring, beholding the love of God and letting it affect you? Or are we too consumed with our cell phones? There is this beautiful picture of this thing for us to behold and to enjoy and we stare down instead at our phones. Are you in awe of God this morning?

Number two, if not, why? There is a reason why. I love the fact that John, who is between sixty and eighty years of age, has been walking sixty plus years since he walked with Jesus personally until Jesus ascended. I love the fact that he has continued to walk with His Spirit. And you can read an older man writing this toward the end of his life in verse 1 who has not grown cold in his love, who has not waned in his love, because he wrote these words: "***Behold what kind of love the Father has given to us.***" He is more amazed when he wrote this than when he was laying his head on Jesus' chest. That is powerful. If there is a reason why we have grown cold, we have to discover why we have gotten there.

Number three - what do you need to see with fresh eyes? What do you need to see with fresh eyes this morning of the dimensions of God's love? Is it the love that overcomes shame, is it the love that amazes, is it the fact that we have been brought into His family, or is it the love that motivates us because there is a promise, a guarantee of

A FRESH LOOK AT GOD'S LOVE
That You May Know - I John Series - Week 7
Ben Rudolph

victory in our lives? What is the love that is going to mesmerize you once again? Let's bow our heads and close our eyes.

One of the prayers we pray every week here, and that is also on the banner on the stage is this prayer: *'God, help us to hear from you today through your Spirit and through your Word.'* That is a prayer we need to keep praying, but I want to modify it a little bit this morning based on what we talked about that the Word of God says. *'God, help me to see you today. Help me to hear you today. Help me to see your love today through your Spirit and through your Word.'* Would you just pray that right now?

'God, we are now entering into this last part of the service. Thank you for your love. None of us would be here if not for your love, if not for the cross, if not for your resurrection, if not for your sacrifice, if not for the faith that you have given to us, if not for the call, if not for the conviction. God, every part of us that is good is from you and because of your great love to us. So God, help us to see it today. Where our eyes have grown dim and our hearts have grown cold, I pray that we would look up. Just as Jesus said, the Son of Man must be lifted up as the serpent was in the wilderness, God help us to lift up our eyes and behold the love of God.'

God, for anyone here this morning that is struggling with shame, or shrinking back from you, with struggles in their own life, with struggles with sin, that God they would not allow the enemy to make them shrink back, but that they would return and abide in the love of Jesus. God, for anyone this morning that has forgotten the benefits and the glory of your family, amaze us God once again. God, motivate us to do exactly what you want us do. We want to be like you, we want to be like Jesus. Fill us, renew us, remind us and help us to leave here today with a deeper love. Help us to swim in it this week. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.'

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.