



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 John 2:28-3:3

1 John 2, 3

"Preparing for his Appearing"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Thank you, Mark, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in 1 John and we're going to finish chapter 2 and begin chapter 3. So we're going to look at John 2:28 through 3:3.

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

"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for this time together. We thank You for this Lord's day, when we can gather as Your people and open the scriptures as we have done and read the text and consider its meaning. We can worship You in a singing of hymns and then in this way as well, in prayer. And so Lord, we thank You for that. What a privilege it is to do that, to do all of that certainly, to open the word of God together, to study together, but to lift up our voices audibly or

just within our hearts to You, to the very throne of grace, and seek Your blessing upon us in this hour and seek it in the hour to come in the other services this day and throughout the week and intercede for others and pray for them.

So, Lord, we thank You for that privilege and we do pray You'd bless Your people, bless those who are discouraged for one reason or another – maybe it's health problems, maybe it's a lack of employment, all kinds of trials that we face in this life. We consider a little bit of that in our text this morning, the challenges that the world presents to us if the world isn't opposing us in person and fighting against us in a spiritual way, just the difficulties of life affect us and affect us spiritually.

And so Lord, we pray for those who are in particular difficulty. We pray that for those who that are sick and those who are under treatment, we pray You'd bless them. We pray for those that are grieving. We read in our passage this morning about the hope that we have of seeing Christ when He comes and what will happen to us should we be in this world when that great event occurs. But if we leave this world before then, we see Him face to face instantly and immediately, and that is a glorious experience beyond anything that we've ever had or can ever even imagine, and it's all because of Your grace, Lord. We give You thanks for that.

But we pray for comfort, for family and friends, for all of us, for the loss of our brothers and sisters. They're lost to us; they're not lost to You. And they're present there in Your presence, rejoicing, glorifying You, and so we rejoice in that, because that ultimately is our goal as well – heaven, the resurrection, the kingdom to come, the eternal state.

We have a great future, all because of Your grace, and that is a large part of what we study this morning in this text. We pray that You would open our ears and our eyes spiritually to the things that we've read and what we will consider, and may it be a great encouragement to us spiritually.

Bless us and build us up in the faith in this hour, in the Sunday School hour. Bless those who teach. We pray for our meeting this evening, that it would be honoring to You and helpful to each of us as we attend and remember the Lord's sacrifice for us. And bless the Wednesday services and may all that's done this week be to Your glory. May we live to Your glory. Equip us to do that from our time of study this morning. We pray that You would prepare our hearts now for that and we pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] Most of us don't like surprise visits. We want time to prepare, to put things in order. We want to dress for the occasion, straighten the house, maybe even hire a maid. And the more important the guest is, the more elaborate the preparation is often times. That's human nature. In the ancient east when a king visited a town, the people would prepare for his coming by repairing what had fallen down, restoring streets, even making a road for his arrival.

Well, in light of that, how are we to prepare for the King of Kings? John tells us He's coming. He wants us to be ready so that we won't be embarrassed by a messy, unkempt life when He arrives. John doesn't tell us when it's going to happen, but it will happen, and it could happen soon. He has just said that we are presently living in the last hour. And now he says he wants us to have confidence when He does appear.

He will literally appear. He will literally, physically return to this world. The world dismisses that as fiction, but it is clearly taught throughout the Bible. The Lord's return is one of the fundamentals of the faith. It's an important doctrine and a preeminently practical doctrine. Few doctrines in the word of God have the power to stimulate godly behavior that the return of our Lord does.

John tells us that. He says that everyone who has this hope of Christ coming purifies Himself. So this is a great doctrine of the Christian faith, the coming of the Lord. But how are we to get ready to meet Him? Well, John tells us, "Abide in Him." And the more we love

Him and the more we long to see Him, the more earnestly we will do that.

That's how John begins the conclusion of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. "Now, little children, abide in Him." They lived in a rough world, a world of seduction and lies, a world of antichrists. The only way to live successfully, faithfully, and not be drawn into it all, is to abide in Him, abide in Christ.

In John chapter 1, the gospel of John, verse 38 of chapter 1, when two of John the Baptist's disciples first met Jesus, they asked Him, "Rabbi, where are You staying?" Literally that is "Where are You abiding?" That's what abiding is. It is staying. It is lodging. It is living, dwelling, remaining, and that's what a genuine child of God does. He or she dwells with Christ, has union in fellowship with Him. That's the lesson that Jesus gave in John chapter 15, with the lesson of the vine and the branches. He is the vine and they, we, are the branches, and we can only be fruitful by abiding in Him.

Believers are all in Him. At the moment of faith, we are placed in Christ. We are placed in a vital relationship with Him from which we could never be removed. But we are responsible to maintain that relationship. We must lodge with Him daily, dwell with Him constantly. That's the only way we have a fruitful life.

Which means we are to study His word, we are to reflect upon it. We are to pray routinely. In John 15:7, Jesus says, "If you abide in Me and my words abide in You, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you." Abiding in Christ involves His words abiding in us. Our relationship with the Lord is governed by scripture. It's governed by knowing the word of God, thinking on it, praying according to it. That takes time, takes effort, discipline, but it results in the fruitful life, which is the successful life. It safeguards us from error and the seduction of the antichrist that John has been speaking of. And it gives a clear vision for the decisions of life that we face daily.

In his study on this passage, Dr. Johnson said, to put it simply, to abide in Christ is to stay where grace puts the believer in touch

with the Lord Jesus Christ. He later added it is impossible to have an unhappy life if we abide in Him.

Now that's what John is encouraging here. He's encouraging a safe life. He's encouraging a happy life. He's encouraging a fruitful life, a successful life. And the promise he gives is that when the Lord returns, we won't be ashamed, not if we're living that kind of life. We will have confidence before Him. Who wants to be found in a worldly or a sinful activity when He comes?

The only way to ensure against that is to abide in Him. That's what a child of God does. That is a proof or an evidence that a person is a child of God. That's what John says in verse 29. "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him." There is a logic to what John is saying here, which he takes from family relationships.

Since God is righteous – that's basic Bible doctrine. God is righteous. What He does is righteous. He is holy and His actions reflect that. They are righteous, they are good, always does good. Well, since God is righteous, it naturally follows that His children will be righteous. And just as a child bears a resemblance to his or her natural parents, so too a child of God bears a resemblance in character to his or her spiritual parent, to the Lord God, to God the Father.

For centuries Europe was ruled by a family, the Habsburgs. And from Austria to Spain they were recognized by some distinctive physical features: a jutting jaw and a large, lower lip. Those features certainly gave away the family resemblance and a family relationship, but a prominent lip didn't make a person a Habsburg. And in the same way, righteousness doesn't make a person a child of God. It is simply a family trait that reveals the reality of the new birth. It shows a person's likeness to his heavenly Father. A child of God practices righteousness characteristically. And what is righteousness? It is obedience – obedience that results from faith that is done to the glory of God.

Lots of people do good deeds. They give their money to charity. They sacrifice their time in public service. But often such things are done for personal gratification, or done for selfish motives. A child of God practices righteousness out of love for the Lord. We don't do it perfectly, of course, and we've made that point repeatedly as we've gone through this first epistle of John.

There's no perfection this side of heaven and John's made that very clear. But moral behavior is a family trait in the family of God. That's what John is saying here, and in saying it, he was clearly undercutting any notion of antinomianism, of lawlessness, the idea that a child of God can live any way that he or she wishes, that we can sin and sin with impunity, if completely unbiblical. And John is affirming that the child of God will not do that. It's not going to character his or her life.

What we will do, what we must do, is abide in Christ, have His word abiding in us. That causes correction when we are straying, and it feeds our souls. It nourishes us spiritually. It changes us. The word of God changes us, sanctifies us. It's a great blessing to be in Christ, to be joined to Him and be a child of God. There's really no greater blessing and privilege in the world than that. The world doesn't think so. The way the world responds to us would not reflect the greatness of that privilege, but it is a great privilege. It's better than anything the world covets. It's better than being a rich celebrity.

We are children of God and that fact filled John with such a sense of wonder that he expresses it in what follows. That's how he begins chapter 3, in absolute amazement at the thought of being born of Him. "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God."

But we're not only called that, we are that. And such we are, John says. It is a reality and he's encouraging those to whom he wrote with that fact we are presently children of God. It's a reality every believer in Jesus Christ has. It's true for every believer that he or she is a child of God, and such we are, and all because of the love of God.

It's certainly not due to us. John gives no suggestion at all that our blessings are in any way deserved, that we have in any sense merited being what we are, children of God. Ultimately the only explanation for the new birth is found only in the vast, deep sea of God's love, whose way, Paul told the Romans, are unsearchable and unfathomable. That's really John's thought here.

The wonder of it is expressed in the phrase "how great." "See how great a love" emphasizes the immeasurableness of God's love. It literally means "of what country." The love of God which snatched us like brands from the burning, that made children of God out of enemies of God, that gave life and hell to the spiritually corrupt and dead is, as it were, of another country, unearthly. It's not of this world. It is foreign to human experience. Men hate their enemies. God loves them. Men kill their enemies. God rescues them. Men disarm enemies. God rearms them with new hearts. We were all of that. We were rebels captured, as someone once said, with weapons in our hands, guilty and in rebellion against the Lord God, and yet He made us His friends. And more than that, He made us His children and Himself our Father.

So John marveled at that. He marveled with wonder at God's love. It is unconditional. It is eternal. It is deliberate and purposeful. It follows a plan and is active. That's characteristic of love – the love of God and the love that we are to have and show to others. It is an active love. It helps others. It changes people. God's love determined what we now are and what we will be. He determined our present blessings and our future blessings, and that's clear from the statement that John makes in verse 29, "born of Him."

"The new birth" is a term deliberately used in the Bible to express the sovereign grace of God. And that I think is very clear as one reflects upon it. After all, no one chooses to be born. No one is active in their birth. We are passive completely. It happens to us. We don't even know it's happened until some time later, after the birth has

occurred. And it's the same in regeneration. The new birth, being born again, God does it. We are the result. We're not the cause of it.

Peter explained it in 1 Peter 1:23, "You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." The gospel is given and God opens the heart to respond to it. He plants in the heart of the individual who is hearing the gospel given the seed of life, new life. He puts His life in the heart, the mind, the being of the unregenerate, the spiritually dead, so that he or she comes to life and the natural response of that life is to believe.

And at that moment a person is saved. And natural birth, we don't realize that birth has occurred for some time later. In the spiritual birth, it's instantaneous. It happens at that moment. If that still is a bit mysterious, as you think about the new birth and how it happens, well, it is mysterious. We're never going to fully understand how this happens, what takes place within us, how God does all of that. But what is clear is we were born, to quote John's gospel, "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Listen, you may hear me and others in this church emphasize the sovereign grace of God in regeneration and faith, but you will never, ever be amazed at the love of God as John was until you realize, until you understand human inability, that we were unable to believe. We were uninterested in believing altogether. Yet He saved us.

When we were not looking for Him – in fact, going in the opposite direction – He looked for us. He sought us and found us and changed us. Now that's the grace of God. It wasn't random. Your spiritual birth wasn't by chance. It was according to His choice, according to His purpose and plan, which is eternal from the foundation of the world, because His love is eternal.

It's only because of His immeasurable love that we are children of God and we know Him. The world doesn't know Him. That's what John tells us. And because it doesn't know Him, it doesn't know us. We have a new father, a heavenly Father, and we naturally have His

likeness, morally and spiritually. And the more we display God's likeness, the more foreign we seem to the world.

And maybe John's friends were feeling that. Maybe when John wrote this letter to them – and I think this is certainly the case – they were feeling the rift between themselves and the world, feeling like aliens on earth. And they were feeling that way because they were. But it's difficult. It's difficult to live life that way in this world, because the world makes it different.

Paul told the Galatians that the world had been crucified to him, no longer had an appeal to him. Its aspirations, its goals, its ways, were not appealing to Paul anymore. The world had been crucified to him, but he said he'd also been crucified to the world. The world, unbelievers, considered him dead. They dismissed him as completely insignificant. He told the Corinthians that he and the apostles had become a spectacle to the world. It considered them fools.

So they went hungry and homeless and were treated roughly. They were the scum of the world, he says – apostles. And the dregs. That's what the unbelieving world thinks of the child of God – not much. It doesn't value who or what we are.

But if that were getting to John's friends and having them discouraged, they needed to realize that's the nature of things in this present life. Don't be surprised by that. The world doesn't know them, because it doesn't know God. And if the only reason we do, who believe in Jesus Christ, is because of God's special grace that brought us into His family, it's all because of His love.

And John was reminding them and, in so doing, reminding us as well, of this for a reason. And that was to encourage them, to encourage us. God has a special love for us. Why that is, we cannot say. But the fact that we know Him is the very proof that He does have that love for us. Don't be discouraged, John is saying.

The Christian life, as the Westminster confession of faith said, is a continual and irreconcilable war. We're in this war as long as we're in his life. It is a conflict that is normal. This is the way life is.

But it is temporary. It's irreconcilable only as long as we're in this world. But this world, this world system that opposes God and appears so important, appears so permanent, isn't. It's passing away, John said. It is presently in the process of passing away. It doesn't last. We do. We are forever.

God's love is permanent. It has made us His children. He loves you that much and will never let you go. The world dismisses us, but we are blessed people, and our future is glorious. Our present is blessed with the absolute security and care and guidance and protection that the God gives. As we walk by faith, we experience that. Our present is a glorious blessing, but the future is far more glorious, and John was reassuring them and us of that very fact. We are blessed more than all the creation and the blessing is real. We are children of God. John's overwhelmed by the wonder of it.

But he recognizes that while the privilege of our position and the riches of our condition may not be all that obvious now – and it's not. The readers of this epistle were probably, as I've said, feeling that, feeling hostility of the world and feeling like the dregs of the world as the apostles did. Nevertheless, it will be obvious in the future, the greatness of our blessings and privilege. That's what he says. That's what John writes in verse 2. It will happen suddenly when He appears. That's when, John says, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

Don't measure the future by the present. Don't think the future is going to be like it is now. Things are going to be completely different. Don't evaluate the present, this present life, by sight, by what you see around us. Think about it. Think about what is coming. Think about your future, your life forever, through faith – faith in God's word. We are children of God right now and the future is glorious.

Today is the battle. Tomorrow is the rest. The present age is the age of justification and sanctification. The future age is that of glorification. Life today is not easy. It's almost a truism to say that. You know that's true. It's not an easy life. It's a struggle. But the hope

of the future should give us incentive to live for it, to live for that future, to invest in the future, not in this present age and this world which is presently passing away and will some day quickly pass away.

People live for experiences, for the experience of pleasure or fame. They think that that's really what life is all about. That's where fulfillment in life is going to be found, in the wonderful experiences of life. And we all fall into that. And it's not to deny that there are pleasures and there are wonderful experiences that the world offers, and that people do that. They have enviable experiences, not experiences that we should envy, but we do.

But those experiences are transient. They are momentary. And while that's hard to believe, I guess, when you're looking at the glitter and the glamour of the life that the world offers, nevertheless, it's true. It doesn't last, and the result is we need more of it. If that's the path we follow, we're always going to seek more and more, because what we have doesn't fully satisfy. There's got to be more of that experience, and it's kind of a non-ending thing.

But children of God have a future that is eternal, it's forever, in which everything is good and glorious. And what is done now for the Lord in obedience does presently satisfy. It gives great satisfaction. It gives the fundamental kind of satisfaction that the world can never offer. And what we do and what satisfies now has benefits, rewards, for all eternity – blessings that last forever.

What is that? What is that glory to come? Well, John indicates it – and I should say only indicates it, only suggests it – that's all he could possibly do was give a kind of hint or suggestion of how great and glorious that future of ours is in the statement that he makes, "We will be like Him." That tells us something, but it doesn't tell us everything. And right, it doesn't really tell us a lot. "We will be like Him."

Now, what that statement does tell us is that we will have a resurrection body, a body that's like our Lord's, that was not bound by space and time. John witnessed all of this, how Jesus could eat food

and eat food with them, fixed them breakfast on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and His resurrection body. And of course His resurrection body could walk through closed doors. It was a physical body – I would say more physical than our bodies are physical – and yet spiritual at the same time.

We get a sense of that, of this glory of that resurrection body, also from the transfiguration when Jesus was on the mountaintop and His face shone like the sun and His garments flashed with light.

But I think the best indication of what it will be like of that glory that awaits us is given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, where he draws an analogy between a common seed and the plant that grows from it. The seed must die, he says, for the plant to grow, and that's true of us. The body that is buried differs from what is raised up, as much as the seed that is planted differs from the tree that grows.

Look at an acorn. There's nothing special about it. Then compare that acorn to an oak tree. It's the same organism. The oak tree is the acorn transformed, but you'd never know it to look at it. You'd never see the oak tree in the acorn. And the disparity between the seed and the plant is the disparity between what these bodies are now and what they will be when Christ comes and we see Him. They will be transformed into something beyond recognition. You could never imagine an oak tree by looking at an acorn. And we can't imagine the resurrection body by looking at these bodies.

That's what Paul says. It is sown a perishable body; it is raised an imperishable body. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. And John says that that great transformation is going to happen in an instant, when Christ appears and we see Him. I take John's meaning to be that the vision of Christ will have a transforming power. The very sight of our Lord will trigger the change.

None of this was a new revelation. They knew this. John says so. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him. So John is saying, "We know this. What I'm telling you, you know." So he's

reviewing old truth with these readers and his friends, the hope of the Lord's return. And that's a good practice.

Dr. Johnson – not our Dr. Johnson, but Samuel Johnson of the 18th century – said, "People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed." It's certainly apostolic to remind people, to recall to people, the great promises of the faith, because we tend to forget things, and this is one thing that we should never forget, and that is Christ is coming. John explains why we need to remember it in verse 3. It motivates change in us. It motivates integrity, good behavior, godliness. "And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

Well, why is that? Well, because we know that what we do now affects the future and what we will be like in the future. What we do now counts for all eternity. The things you do are not unimportant. The things that you think are not unimportant, they have ramifications for all eternity, and eternity is soon coming.

In 1 Corinthians 15:32, Paul writes that if there is no future, there would be no point in making sacrifices, in living for the Lord and laying down one's life for Him. We should, rather, live for ourselves. That's certainly going to be the attitude of those who have no hope of the future, that this is all there is, this life. And so Paul says we'll adopt this idea. We should, if that's the reality. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Just live for the moment.

But knowing what we know and knowing that what we do matters for all eternity, that will be something that moves us to live a godly, obedient life. It's rewarded. It has effects for all eternity, and so we will be moved and motivated by that to live for eternity and not serve time, not simply live for this moment.

But we don't want to live for the moment either, because we do not want to displease Christ, not if we love Him. If we know Him and love Him, we will be concerned to serve Him faithfully, simply for that reason. We don't want to please Him, when he comes, we don't want to shrink away, as John says, in shame, because we have been

caught in foolish behavior or worldly enterprises. The knowledge that the Lord may come at any time keeps us alert and active, diligent at our job, helpful to others.

And it gives hope. The struggle we are in with the world, the flesh, and the devil, this life of continual and irreconcilable war, will end. It's not permanent. It will end and it will end triumphantly. That gives a desire to fight the good fight. That's how the Lord should find us when He returns. He should find us with weapons in our hands, but His weapons, the word of God, and in active service for Him, fighting the good fight.

John wants us prepared for that and to be encouraged by the end of all things. What now appears ignoble will be noble, glorious. That's very encouraging. That's our future. That's our hope. But John also wants us to be ready for the Lord when He comes. This is the day of preparation and the way that we prepare is abide in Him. We draw close to the Lord by listening to His word.

Well, the greatest pictures of doing that – it's a very familiar one to all of you – but it's the one that's given in Luke chapter 10, when Jesus was visiting the house of Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, who were attending to the Lord. One of the great pictures of that is they're both seeking out the Lord, seeking to serve Him in one way or another. Martha was doing that by busily preparing a meal and, really, wearing herself out by doing a good service for Jesus and for the others. She was working hard for them with the best of motives. She wanted to please the Lord.

Well, her sister was seated at the Lord's feet listening to His words. Well, Martha complained and we can understand that. She wanted help in the kitchen, and we can understand that. But the Lord answered her in a way that she wasn't expecting and was a little surprising to us, but very instructive. She said that Martha was bothered by too many things. It wasn't that she wasn't doing a good thing, but she was bothered by too many things. Mary, He says, has chosen the good part.

What pleases the Lord more than serving is sitting at His feet. It is listening to His words. It is being with Him, walking with Him, like Enoch of old. It is abiding with Him. And as we sit at His feet and learn from His words, we are nourished. Our souls are strengthened. We grow spiritually, mentally, in wisdom and knowledge, and we are transformed. We're changed through that process, through that experience.

Paul tells us that in 2 Corinthians 3:18, that beholding His glory and thinking on His glory, on the person of Christ, has a transforming effect. The Holy Spirit uses that change us into the Lord's likeness from glory to glory. That's what we experience now. As we read the word of God, as we fellowship with Him, we're transformed from glory to glory. So how do we prepare for the Lord's appearance? Well, the same way that we prepare for visitors at home. We put things in order. We dress for the occasion. We straighten the house. Meaning we put on righteousness or, Paul told the Romans, we put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We stop carousing, we stop living a worldly life, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We put our lives in order and we do that by spending time with the Lord now in prayer and Bible study and fellowship with the saints. That not only prepares us for the Lord's coming, it prepares us for the day's decisions. It produces maturity of mind and integrity in our relationships. It makes us people of character.

So may God help us to increasingly abide in Him. Those who do have a fruitful life and will find it impossible, as Dr. Johnson said, to have an unhappy life. If you're here without Christ – you may have a busy life. You may have even a wealthy life. You may have a life full of interesting and pleasurable experiences, but it can't last. It can't last, because this world in which you have those experiences doesn't last. It's passing away. And even if it doesn't pass away anytime soon completely, you're going to pass away some day. Then what?

If you want eternal life, if you want glory forever, then come to Christ. Believe in Him. He died for all who do. He will make you a

child of God, a child of the King, and an heir of the kingdom. May God bring You to Himself and you who have been brought and are a child of God, rejoice in what you are, rejoice in what is coming. It's glorious. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for this text of scripture with its instruction, its admonition, its exhortation to us. And the hope that we have here, what John reminds us of, truth that we know, but he reminds us of it again, because we need to be reminded. We so often forget that this life is very temporary. It's passing away at this very moment and we're rushing, genuinely rushing toward eternity.

We feel like we're standing still, like things aren't progressing, really. They're progressing rapidly. Eternity is upon us. May we live for that. We need to be reminded of the Lord's coming. We need to be reminded of the eternal glory that awaits us, because we get so caught up in the world around us, as though it's what's permanent. Help us to live for what is permanent, truly permanent: the glory to come, eternity to come.

We thank You for the grace, the love, the sacrifice that brought us into your family and gave us this glorious future. And we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and it's in His name we pray. Amen.