

## Beyond Imagination

### Heart to Heart, Part 2

*1 John 3:2-3*

His Italian mother named him after Mark, the Gospel writer and disciple of Christ, in the hopes that he too would tell the gospel truth.

When Mark – or Marco in Italian – was only 17 years of age, he began an epic journey with his merchant uncle and father – a journey in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century which would last more than 25 years.

The men would eventually travel through nations and countries like Russia, Afghanistan, Persia and over the Himalayas. They eventually become the first Europeans to enter the vast empire of China, ruled by the Kublai Kahn in what is now Beijing.

Marco Polo became the court favorite of the Kublai Khan – the most powerful ruler of the largest kingdom on planet earth. For many years, the emperor refused to allow Marco to return home to Venice – using him instead as a representative of the court as he explored throughout the kingdom.

He would see, and later write of cities that made European capitals look like roadside villages. He even wrote about the emperor’s own palace in modern Beijing dwarfing the castles of Europe – the emperor’s palace banquet room he claimed was large enough to seat 6,000 dinner guests at one time, each person eating from utensils of pure gold.

Marco saw the world’s first paper money, the use of an elaborate postal system with third class, second class and first class mail divisions; he would write about the explosive power of gunpowder – and it would be 400 years before Europe would manufacture as much steel as China was producing in the year 1267.

After serving the emperor for nearly two decades, Marco was allowed to return home. All of his belongings were loaded onto more than a dozen

ships, along with 600 people. He never recorded in writing why he arrived with only 1 ship and 18 survivors, but we do know that the journey would take him nearly 2 years to complete the journey. He sailed into Venice loaded down with gold, silk, spices – including the recipe of a favorite Chinese culinary invention – pasta.

The Italians got all the credit for that one.

Many people refused to believe his fantastic tales of wealth, commerce, architecture and culture . . . many 13<sup>th</sup> century Europeans assumed he was speaking of some mythical place from his own imaginative mind.

At the age of 70, Marco Polo was on his deathbed. Legend has it that members of his family encouraged him to confess any exaggerations or lies before he died – he had none to confess. In fact, what we do know is that he died after whispering his now famous final words – “I have not told you half of all I saw, for I knew I would not be believed.”<sup>1</sup>

1300 years before Marco Polo described his explorations throughout China, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the name of John, wrote of an amazing journey to the very palace of heaven. And in his record of that event we call the Book of Revelation, John described some of sights and sounds of heaven that still defy our imagination.

In fact, before that heavenly exploration took place, John had already sent several letters to the believing church about the inheritance of the believer and how that coming glory of Christ should energize and incentivize every aspect of the believer’s life.

Even in his brief letters, John is clearly captivated by the certainty of not only seeing the

glory of the resurrected Savior, but the future inheritance of the children of God as well.

He doesn't want us to overlook any of it, remember?

Let's go back to *First John, chapter 3 and verse 1 and get a running start – See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.*

In other words, don't forget who you are;

- you have been chosen by the Father and born again through the application of divine life;
- you have been adopted into the family of God by the fulfillment of divine law;
- and you have been betrothed to God the Son through the covenant of divine love.

You are now royalty – *“Look at this,” John writes, “we are children of God!”*

I watched with some fascination this past week as the second son of the Prince of Wales came to America for a 7 day visit.

Pictures kept showing up on my Iphone AP News service.

So I dug into an article to find out the reason for all the fuss. He was being photographed with senate leaders; meeting with the president's wife . . . attending special events . . . I found out it wasn't really anything official; it wasn't because he had some message from his grandmother, the Queen of England; not because he had anything to offer our situation as the former colonies of Great Britain . . . it really came down to the fact that he was a member of the royal family and he was treated, rightly so, with royal respect as a guest of honor.

Not because of anything he had to say, but simply because of the family to which he belonged.

And people wanted to see a prince up close.

John adds at the end of *verse 1 – the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*

In other words, they had no idea that when they walked by you – you were a member of the Divine Royal family. That had no clue that when they brushed past you; when they refused to return your greeting, they were snubbing a future shining immortal prince or princess of royal pedigree who will one day sit upon a throne as co-regent with the eternal creator God the Son.

Nobody's lining up to take your picture . . . they have no idea who you are.

But John's not so worried about them overlooking you . . . he's concerned that we're overlooking it too!

So what John will do in these next 2 verses is effectively deliver two convictions and three reactions; two convictions and then three reactions.

### 1. And the first conviction, is a conviction about who we are.

He adds for the sake of emphasis – *verse 2. Beloved, now we are children of God.*

It's as if John says, “I know I've already said it before, but I want to say it again . . . we are children of God.”

In other words, don't forget the family to whom you belong. You are related to God . . . notice the word – *now!* *Beloved, now we are the children of God.*

As if to say, “Don't wait for your robe and crown . . . don't wait for your assignment in the coming Kingdom on earth to recognize your status now”.

It'll be here before you know it . . .

John described the kingdom briefly in Revelation 19 and 20, and he would have to admit that he didn't describe anywhere near half of the grandeur and splendor and magnificence and glory of that coming global empire with Jesus on the throne.

But the Apostle John wants us to develop the inner conviction that translates into an outer attitude and bearing – this happens to be who we are, whether the world recognizes us or not.

*We are, right now, children of God.* This is the amazing conviction about who we are. And that's just the beginning.

**The first conviction is a conviction about who we are.**

The second conviction is about:

### 2. Who We Will Become

John presents the concept of “now”, and then “not yet.”

Notice, *Beloved, now are we the 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.*

By the way, don't overlook the certainty of John.

*We know that when (not if) when He appears . . . we will be like Him . . . we will see Him.*

John uses a verb translated here, *we know* for perceptive knowledge to the point of conviction.<sup>ii</sup>

He uses a word for seeing Him – *we will see Him* – a rare form of the verb that refers not only to

seeing Him with our eyes, with perception and recognition, but more than some physiological occurrence – it’s a word that refers not just to recognition but appreciation.<sup>iii</sup>

In other words, built into that coming glory of Christ will be the work of the indwelling Spirit of God within us to immediately appreciate the Son of God to a depth never attained in life – to magnify and exalt and appreciate and glory in the worship of the one true and living deity-emboding Son of God.

We’re going to know it’s Him when He appears – a reference to His appearance again, not His advent – this is an implied reference to the believer who is alive when Jesus comes for His beloved. In other words, our raptured and immediately glorified bodies will shed Adam’s sinful nature and we will be immortalized and glorified instantaneously.

***When we see Him . . . notice – we will be like Him.***

Here’s the long awaited end to our sanctification . . . our future face-to-face encounter with the glorified Christ will complete our transformation into His likeness.<sup>iv</sup>

We will be forever perfected in holiness . . . John writes, we will be like Christ.

That doesn’t means we’re going to become little gods . . . omnipresent, omnipotent or omniscient – those are not attributes communicated to us – ever – they belong to God alone.

But it does mean that our glorified bodies will be immortal . . . perfected . . . never corrupting . . . no longer corrupted by sin.

This was the longing of Paul at the end of his personal testimony in ***Romans 7 – who will deliver me – unwrap me – from this body of death . . . this sinful flesh.***

John writes, here’s when it’ll happen . . . ***when He appears we will be like Him*** . . . that is, at that moment we will:

- no longer be bound to decaying, depraved, sinful flesh;
- no more sin clouding our minds;
- no more self-centeredness distorting our motives;
- no more pride binding our hearts;
- no more lust and covetousness diverting our worship,
- no more discontent and greed muting our praise and thanksgiving.

If we are alive when He appears to rapture the church – and if not – moments after we die and immediately go to be with Him, we will see Him – and John informs us that when we see Him – we will not only recognize Him but our love and appreciation for Him will be what it should be and what we longed for it to be and grieved when it wasn’t and groaned for it to become.

What is John convinced of?

There’s so much more coming . . . in fact, we don’t even know the half of it!

- From the brief descriptions we’re given in the New Testament, every believer will one day have a resurrected, recognizable, perfected body (1 Corinthians 15)
- We’ll retain the uniqueness of our personalities – we won’t all become cookie cutter objects without personality and unique talent – only perfected. In other words, if you didn’t play the piano on earth there is not one hint in scripture that you’re going to know how to play the piano in heaven.
- Which means if you don’t know how to play the harp, you won’t be playing a harp in heaven either.
- We also can observe that we will retain our memories of earth (Revelation 6:10), although our memories will be perfected by godly wisdom and holy justice and the perspective of our sovereign Lord whom we will talk with face to face.
- We also know that our glorified bodies will be able to enjoy food – just as Jesus ate fish with His disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:42);
- We’re also informed that God will have designed the tree of life to bear different fruit along the river of life in the Father’s House – the city of God – and the tree will bear fruit every 30 days (Revelation 22:2)) – which implies the passing of time – and even months in the year.
- But even in this little clue of our future home, New Testament scholars are still unable to determine from the language John the Apostle uses if it’s 12 different kinds of fruit – a different kind of fruit each month – sort of like a perfected Harry and David system; or, if the trees

bear the same fruit – a fresh crop – 12 time a year.

- From other passages we know we'll communicate, learn, worship, serve, fellowship, explore . . . never get sick, never get weak, never weep again in sorrow, never hang our heads again in shame, never in anguish over sin, never again wishing we could see the Lord or talk to Him personally . . . and never again grow weary.

Frankly, the Bible doesn't really tell us even half of the glory of our eternal state when we are in the presence of Jesus Christ.

But I love the way John puts it here in this text – *it doesn't yet appear what we will be.*

In other words, don't let appearances fool you. There are similarities, but remarkable differences.

One author illustrated this text a generation ago; From looking at an acorn, would you ever imagine the existence of a great oak tree? No, it doth not yet appear what it shall be. From looking at a scrawny, awkward, fuzzy eaglet, can you prophecy that one day it will soar with tireless wings upon the air; that it will defy the hurricane and scream at the clouds? No, it doth not yet appear what it shall be. From looking at a crawling, earthbound caterpillar, can you prophecy that someday it will lift itself from the dust upon wings of multicolored beauty and make its home among the flowers? No, it doth not yet appear what it shall be.<sup>v</sup>

Beloved, here's the conviction of the Apostle John - You and I are only shadows – whispers – of what we will become.

The Apostle Paul simply writes that we will go from being earthy to being heavenly; that our mortality will be exchanged for immortality. (*I Corinthians 15*)

We haven't seen anything yet!

One theologian wrote a parable from this text, imagining twins inside a mother's womb – a boy and a girl – having a conversation.

The sister said to her brother, "I believe there is life after birth."

Her brother protested, "No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling to the cord that feeds us."

The little girl insisted, "There must be something more than this dark place. There must be something else, a place with light where there is freedom to move." Still, she could not convince her twin brother.

After some silence, the sister said hesitantly, "I have something else to say, and I'm afraid you won't believe that, either, but I think there is a mother."

"A mother!" her brother shouted, "What are you talking about? I have never seen a mother, and neither have you. Who put that idea into your head? This place is all we have. Why do you always want more? This is not such a bad place, after all."

The little girl said, "But . . . don't you feel those squeezes every once in a while? They're quite unpleasant and sometimes even painful."

(I think this reminder is perfect for Mother's day!)

"Yes," he answered. "What [about them]?"

"Well," the sister said, "I think that these squeezes are getting us ready for some other place, much more beautiful than this, where I, for one, believe we will see our mother face-to-face."<sup>vi</sup>

**Two convictions . . .**

- **The first is a conviction about who we are.**
- **The second is about who we will become.**

Two convictions . . . three reactions.

In other words, if we truly believe that we are the children of divine royalty . . . if we truly believe that Jesus Christ is going to appear and we're going to be made immortal and perfected after His image, what are we going to do about it now?

John believes we ought to pursue three ongoing reactions:

*Notice verse 3. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Let me unpack this into three reactions.

### **1. First, we need to continually redefine our ambition.**

And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him – the hope that we have in us – subjectively – is a hope that we have placed upon Him – objectively.

The word translated *hope* is used by John as that future expectation of the coming of Christ [and life eternal in His presence].<sup>vii</sup>

Listen, the sense that we will live forever somewhere has literally shaped every civilization in human history.

Australian aborigines pictured an eternal future as a distant island beyond the western horizon; the early Finns thought it was also a distant island, but in the far away east; Mexicans, Peruvians and

Polynesians believed that they would either live forever on the sun or on the moon after death. Native Americans believed their spirits would live forever hunting the spirits of buffalo. The Gilgamesh epic, from ancient Babylon believed in a resting place at a tree of life. The pyramids of Egypt are testimonies to the belief that embalmed bodies would resurrect – maps were carefully laid at the side of deceased pharaohs and politically powerful families in order to guide them to the future world; Romans believed they would rest in the Elysian Fields with horses grazing nearby.<sup>viii</sup>

Although these eternal places and eternal ambitions change from culture to culture – there is this unifying theme around the globe emanating from the heart of mankind – this world that you see is not all there is.<sup>ix</sup>

And they're right. But their hope is fixed to the legends and testimonies of men long dead.

Our hope is fixed on something radically different.

Our map to a future existence is not based on the teachings of someone occupying a grave, who supposedly made it to the place he believed in – his followers can only hope he did.

Our map is a Person who rose from the grave and validated His claim to be the way, the truth and the life (*John 14:6*)

Our hope is not fancied legend – it is confirmed in the historically validated resurrection of Jesus Christ – seen by more than 500 witnesses and more before ascending to heaven (*I Corinthians 15:6*)

Our hope then is anchored – it is fixed – upon our resurrected and ascended and soon returning Savior.

But the truth of the matter is that we as believers can lose the defining objectivity of our longings.

Listen, I've never met a Christian who didn't say he or she wasn't interested in heaven with God one day.

But the truth is, the believer can start longing for earth, rather than longing and looking for the coming of Christ and His kingdom.

We can start acting like settlers rather than pilgrims.

Our ambitions then become no more different or forward thinking than the ambitions of earthbound pagans who simply live for the next promotion or the next paycheck or the next party or the next partner.

Which is why John uses a present tense participle here for “having this hope.”<sup>x</sup>

In other words, having this hope is pictured as someone who daily, actively treasures this hope – it matters to him.

- Look at his checkbook and you'll find if Jesus really matters to him;
- look at his schedule and you'll find places that indicate Jesus matters to him;
- and those who belong to Jesus matter
- and those who don't yet belong to Jesus Christ matter
- talk to him about his school or his job and you'll discover that his school or his career is simply the place where he really wants to make sure people know Jesus Christ matters.

That's having your hope truly fixed on Him – He really is your treasure.

The Chicago Tribune ran an article on an author who worked in a steel mill. This former steel worker wrote a book where he described a scene of silvery dust flakes that frequently floated to the floor in an area of the mill where steel strips rolled over pads in a tall cooling tower. For years, workers and visitors alike flocked to that sight, which was especially picturesque at night. But then . . . much later . . . they discovered the danger of asbestos . . . everybody had breathed those silvery asbestos flakes . . . and many of these employees especially, like this author, are now dying. He makes this telling comment – And to think we used to fight over that job.<sup>xi</sup>

That was the job to have . . . that was the enviable placement in the mill – I want to have that job!

What an illustration of deadly enchantment. What kind of silver flakes are we chasing today . . . they're all the rage . . . but they will soon be found to be dangerous distractions if not deadly.

The Apostle John is effectively saying here that if we are indeed royalty and the coming of Christ is ahead and with Him our immortality, we ought to be continually redefining our longings – our true treasure . . . our ambition.

## **2. Secondly, we need to continually be readdressing our purification.**

Notice, John writes, in *verse 3, And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself.*

Obviously, this is not a reference to the purification of regeneration – or some personal ability to purify yourself from sin.

John has already made it clear in the first chapter of this letter and *verse 7 that the blood of Christ continually cleanses us from all sin.*

But here John is simply stressing our responsibility to live for Christ in purity.

This word *to purify* is a word that refers to ceremonial cleanliness. Like the priests of the Old Testament washing their hands and the instruments of the Temple, they would be ceremonially cleansed for service.

The word to purify originally referred to something that was ritually clean. It eventually, in the New Testament came to refer to wholehearted inward dedication to Christ.<sup>xii</sup>

Again, this is a present tense verb which means to daily, regularly purify oneself.

This is simply the discipline of godly living.

This is Paul, connecting for Titus the same things John is connecting here; Paul told Titus to *deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age [while doing what?] looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus (Titus 2:12-13)*

Purifying ourselves involves the daily battle to cleanse what we do with our minds, our thoughts, our speech, our eyes, our hands, our disappointments, our fears, our injuries, our enemies, our plans, our desires and on and on.<sup>xiii</sup>

Are we going to daily purify ourselves or daily inch closer and closer to impurities?

How close to the line will we come?

I came across a really tragic illustration of this very idea and set it aside for my files. There's a book that actually chronicles the nearly 700 people who fell into the Grand Canyon over the past 140 years. Many have died as the result of an airplane or helicopter crash; others drowned while rafting the river; still others have taken their own lives by jumping. But according to this author a number of people have gone over the edge and fallen to their death through their own carelessness. Like one 38 year old father in 1992 who was jokingly trying to frighten his teenage daughter by leaping onto a guardrail wall. He flailed his arms as he pretended to lose his balance, then seeing there was a ledge on the other side, pretended to fall. Even though there were numerous warning signs, he jumped down on

the other side of the wall and lost his footing and feel 400 feet to his death.

Just a year ago, an 18 year old young lady was hiding on the North Rim Trail and decided to venture off the beaten path to have her picture taken at a spot known as Inspiration Point. As she sat down on the ledge, the rock suddenly gave way, and she plummeted more than 1,000 feet to her death.<sup>xiv</sup>

Why in the world would a Christian come up to the Grand Canyon called sin and say, "I wonder how many warning signs I can ignore today? I wonder how close I can get to the edge without falling in?"

Why would we ever think that way . . . especially since we're royalty . . . and our immortality and unimaginable reign with Christ is just around the corner?

No wonder John says that if these are your convictions – these ought to be your reactions:

- **Continually redefine your ambition**
- **Continually readdress your purification.**

Thirdly . . .

### 3. Continually readjust your reflection

Notice the object of your imitation – *verse 3, And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

*Even as He – Christ – is pure.*

You notice that John doesn't say that Christ continually purifies Himself – no, *we* continually purify ourselves – Christ doesn't need to . . . He was and is and always will be pure.

He becomes the pattern for our self-purification. He is morally blameless, uncontaminated, and sinless.<sup>xv</sup>

Reflect Him.

**We need to daily –**

- **Continually redefine our ambition**
- **Continually readdress our purification**
- **Continually readjust our reflection – as we imitate Christ now.**

Why?

Because we are convinced with the Apostle John of these two conviction – the conviction of who we are – royalty – children of God

And because Christ is going to appear and like Him we are going to become – robed in holy perfection and glorious immortality, forever.

Here's a man who got it right. No seminary degree hanging on his wall . . . barely a high school education . . . an hourly worker in the machine shop where Chuck Swindoll worked as a young man. He never forgot that man. This older gentleman, named George, basically had one job – to sweep out the shavings underneath the huge lathes and machines as well as sweep the floor while the crew kept the machines running.

It was dusty, dirty work.

Swindoll remembers this man often talking about Christ – he loved to talk about scripture related to the coming of Christ and heaven beyond. Swindoll writes that you would often hear him singing while he swept. Late one Friday afternoon, it was almost quittin' time and I looked at George and said, "George are you ready for tonight?" He said, "Yep." But his clothes were filthy. He was obviously not ready. I said, "Look at you, Man, you're not ready, you've got to go clean up." No, he

said, "let me show you something. So he unzipped his coveralls and underneath were the neatest, cleanest clothes you can imagine. He had them on . . . all ready to go. All he did when the whistle blew was just unzip and step out of that coverall, walk up, punch his clock and he was out of there. He turned to me just before he left and said [something I never forgot], "You see," he smiled, "I stayed ready to keep from getting' ready – just like I'm ready for Jesus to come." And with that, he was gone.<sup>xvi</sup>

I'm staying ready, to keep from getting ready – that's pretty good theology.

John effectively says the same – because of who we are – and because of who we're going to become – this is what we ought to be doing in the meantime.

We're living ready . . . we're staying ready . . . for that moment when Jesus comes. Listen, everybody who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself, just as He is pure.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/12/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Wikipedia/MarcoPolo;

Adapted from Robert Petterson "All Things New," [2/04/2011 preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/February/5021411](http://2/04/2011/preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/February/5021411)

ii Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Epistles of John* (Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 80

iii Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John* (Tyndale Publications, 1998), p. 63.

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v Roy L. Laurin, *First John: Life At Its Best* (Kregel, 1987), p. 106

vi Citation:www.preachingtoday.com

vii C. Marvin Pate, *The Writings of John* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 283

viii Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004), p. IX

ix Ibid

x Hiebert, p. 139

xi "Steelworkers Break the Mold," *Chicago Tribune* (6-27-01)

xii Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume 1* (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 122+

xiii Joel Beeke, *The Epistles of John* (Evangelical Press, 2006), p. 119

xiv "Carelessness Causes Deaths at the Grand Canyon" [www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/july/2070212.html](http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/july/2070212.html)

xv Hiebert, p. 140

xvi Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart* (Word Publishing, 1998), p. 507