



Sermon: [We Shall See God!](#) - Pastor Todd Goldschmidt

Sunday 10:15 am – November 6th, 2011 – At Living Hope Lutheran Church

Sermon Text:

1 John 3:1-3 New International Version 1984 (NIV1984)

¹ How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.



Sermon: We Shall See God!

All Saints Day – 10:15 am – November 6th, 2011 – **Pastor Todd Goldschmidt**

If you really want to know the heart of a pastor, or understand what his church believes, teaches and confesses, attend a funeral service where he's the preacher. Funerals provide a unique opportunity to address the ultimate questions of life and death, salvation and eternal destiny. Does his sermon provide hope, and if so, on what basis? Does it alleviate doubt; speak to sin as the cause of death and to Jesus as the *only* source of salvation; and comfort the mourners with the certain hope of eternal life at the risen Redeemer's side in heaven because their dearly departed trusted in Jesus as their Savior from sin and the Lord of their life? Or, conversely, does he leave the bereaved uncertain about the eternal destiny of their loved one, raising doubts in their minds as to whether or not the deceased did enough to earn salvation; or, more likely these days, does he point to their good deeds as the *cause* of their salvation? Does a glowing eulogy serve as the sermon's basis, or is it based on the unshakable foundation of the living & enduring Word of God?

These are also relevant questions for us today as we observe All Saints' Day and contemplate the souls of the faithful departed who have gone before us to be with Jesus. The Latino community calls this special day, "Día de los muertos"—"the day of the dead"—and the family will often have a picnic at the gravesite of a grandparent or another relative whom they choose to honor. Since the 3rd century, Christians have gathered together on a special day to remember and give thanks to God for those, who by faith in Christ, have won the victory over death and have gone on to join that "great multitude" of today's first lesson, whose "robes have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb" of God. Yet even as we rejoice in their eternal triumph, we also focus our hearts on our own mortality and recognize that our life is but a fleeting breath, no matter how old we get. A century here on earth is but a drop in a bucket compared to eternity.

This morning's sermon text from St. John's First Epistle instructs us in all these "bottom-line" issues, keeping this thought uppermost in our minds:

WE SHALL SEE GOD AS HE IS!

God sees things differently than we do. We reason, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," when we've been wronged. Our innate desire for revenge is strong. We believe that a person should have to pay for their misdeeds—particularly if that person has hurt or harmed us or one of our loved ones. "What goes around comes around," we say karmically when we hear that some misfortune has befallen a person we can't stand. "They deserved it," we think, "for the way they treat others!" But what about when the shoe's on the other foot? What about those times when we've dealt with others in ways that are far from loving and God-pleasing? Do we think we deserve to be punished by God for our sins, or do we dismiss them as inconsequential? Do we minimize them as not really all that bad in the long run—especially compared to others' sins?



Good thing that God doesn't take that same approach with us, because if he did, we'd be in a world of hurt! What if the Lord said to us, "How many times do I have to forgive you for the same sin? Oh, you utter half-hearted prayers for strength not to do the same thing the next time around, but then you put yourself into situations where you're bound to fall into temptation. How long do you expect me to stand by and watch you make a fool of me and a mockery of my love for you? I'm sick and tired of you despising my Son's death for your sins! To hell with you!" The Judge of all mankind is a holy God who must punish sin! Were He to take His righteous wrath out on us, we'd experience unimaginable pain and suffering, not just for a day or two or even for the course of our lifetime, but for an endless succession of days in hell's white-hot furnace, forever removed from His gracious presence and blessings—which even unbelievers benefit from here on earth. Jesus said that God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good."

The Bible indicates that there are degrees of suffering in hell. According to the writer of the book of Hebrews, the worst punishment is reserved for those who have known the truth of God's Word at one point in their life, believed it, and then turned their backs on it. In chapter 10 of his book, he writes: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a person deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (vv. 26-31).

I don't know about you, but that absolutely scares the soup out of me at the most visceral level! The thought of suffering eternally in the fires of hell with Satan as my slave-master terrifies me! But my fear alone, however real, is not enough to save me from my much-deserved fate. Only Jesus can do that. Only Jesus, the ever-divine Son of the living God, who was miraculously conceived by "the Spirit of grace" in the womb of a Jewish virgin named Mary. What a wonder that day in the City of David, when she gave birth to the God-man in a stable, wrapped him in a receiving blanket, and laid him in a cattle feeding trough because the no-vacancy signs were lit up in all of Bethlehem's inns. Mary and Joseph gave that precious child the name *Jesus* just like God's angel Gabriel told them to. That Hebrew moniker means *Savior*, for their blessed baby boy would become the Savior of all mankind! A few verses after our sermon text, John said of Jesus' rescue mission: "The reason the Son of Man appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (v. 8).



And destroy it He did! The Lamb of God offered His sinless life on the altar of the cross as the “atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2)! He took on Himself all of the inborn evil that corrupts our soul and the whole load of our guilt before God. He endured the suffering we deserve in the fires of hell, thereby paying the full price we owed the Almighty Judge for every sin we’ve committed in thought, word or deed. Jesus’ exultant, “It is finished!” declares our own victory over sin’s culpability and control! His glorious resurrection on the third day trumpets our triumph over death and the grave! When we were bathed in the waters of our baptism into Christ, an amazing spiritual transformation took place: we were reborn as adopted sons and daughters of the King of kings and the Lord of lords! And so John could write at the outset of our sermon text: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” You and I have the most revered status on the planet: we are the dearly loved offspring of the Ruler of all!

Here on earth, we live between the “now” and the “not yet.” We look, dress and go about our business just like the children of the world, who don’t see anything particularly special about us. In fact, we’re often despised or pitied as those who subscribe to an out-dated, superstitious philosophy that many skeptics believe has run its course. But John reminds us: “The reason the world does not know us (as royal subjects of our Lord) is that it did not know him” as its heaven-sent Redeemer. But we know better! For John adds, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” If we have something to look forward to in life, it’ll keep us going. If kids know that Disney World awaits them at the end of the car ride, they don’t mind the trip. As believers in Jesus, we have something awesome to look forward to: eternal life at our Savior’s side in heaven! That truth keeps us going in life especially when times are tough.

On the Last great Day, our exalted Lord will return “in the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:20) accompanied by “thousands upon thousands of his holy” (Jude 14) angels, and “every eye will see him” (Rev. 1:7)! He will raise all the dead, reunite their bodies with their eternal souls and then—together with those who are still alive at Jesus’ return—they will be separated into two groups for judgment just like “a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” His “sheep” will be “on his right and the goats on his left” (Matt. 25:33). His judging will be swift and precise. No one will be spared. Isaiah prophesied concerning that adjudication: “It will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor” (24:2). One’s standing in this life will not be taken into consideration at the final judgment. Only one thing will permit a person to escape eternal condemnation in hell: faith in Christ. That will be the distinguishing mark of those who hear these words from Jesus: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).



Fellow sheep of the Good Shepherd, those will be the most blessed words we will ever hear! In view of that moment, John says, “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” Ours is a “living hope,” for we have a guaranteed birthright waiting for us in heaven. God originally inspired Isaiah (64:4) to pen this beautiful promise, reaffirmed by the Apostle Paul in his 1st letter to the Corinthians (2:9): “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him,” Paul adding, “but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (v. 10). Until that moment—which could come at any time—we continue to cling to God’s promises by Spirit-worked faith with the unshakable confidence that after the cross we’ve born for Christ in this fallen world a glorious, imperishable, “crown of life” awaits us in the world to come! In the meantime, while we eagerly anticipate our Savior’s coming, we do our best to share the light of His grace with those who still stumble around in spiritual darkness. We strive to “live holy and godly lives as [we] look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” through our prayers and our faithful witness (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

The saints above eagerly await our arrival! They can hardly wait to have us join them in heaven! Paul wrote, “Now we see but a poor reflection” of God “as in a mirror” that’s been clouded by our cares and concerns as if by the steam from a hot shower. But then, in heaven, “we shall see” God “face to face. Now [we] know in part; then [we] shall know fully, even as [we] are fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). So rejoice and give thanks to the Lord on this All Saints Day celebration that you have loved ones who have gone before you in to those hallowed halls! And continue to cling tenaciously to Christ, your Savior, so that you can join Him and them there one eternal day! Amen.