

# The World Did Not Know Him So That...

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All Saints' Day

Pastor Josh Frazee

1 John 3:1-3

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Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Explanation of the Small Catechism, the new, maroon one, question 190 asks: “To whom does God give eternal life?” The answer is threefold; and it is an answer worth contemplating today, All Saints’ Sunday. Most of the answer we may consider from time to time in our everyday lives, but the last part may be new to you, or may not come to mind for you too often.

The answer “(t)o whom...God gives eternal life” begins with letter A: “Eternal life is a present possession.” The second part, letter B, says that “(a)t the time of death, the soul of a believer is immediately with Christ in heaven.” Again, these two answers are likely ones you consider from time to time.

In John’s Gospel, he wrote that “(w)hoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” “(H)as”—present tense. We have eternal life even today. You know this from the Scriptures and from hearing your pastors preach and teach it from time to time. So, too, do you know that your soul will go to heaven following your death. Your pastors have borne witness to this, and so do the Scriptures. You might even consider Jesus’ response to the criminal beside Him on the cross next to His: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise.”

These we can call to mind quickly and easily; but what about the third point of the answer to that question? It says “C. At the Last Day the believers, both in body and soul, will begin the full enjoyment of being with Christ forever.” Do you often consider that fact; or do you more often think of dying and going to heaven, *and that’s as far as you get?*

Yet all three of these are true. In good Lutheran fashion, we conclude with the words “This is most certainly true.” So the explanation closes this section on the Apostle’s Creed asking “Why do you close this article with the words ‘This is most certainly true’?” The answer: “Because all that I confess in this article is plainly taught in the Bible and therefore I firmly believe it.” So let’s dig a little deeper into each of these thoughts, and especially to how God will bring us to the new heaven and new earth not just in soul, but even in a glorified new body.

## Verse 1

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

On this All Saints’ Sunday, our thoughts often go to those who have passed away in the faith before us. They are the ones, as our First Reading put it, “‘coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’” They are the Church Triumphant. But does the word “saint” only apply to those who have already passed away?

Some of you may remember what Pastor Holtz taught on this topic—that no, every one of us who have heard the Word and believe it are saints, not just those who have passed on before us. Likewise the “Lutheranism 101” book puts it this way: “The word *saint* in Scripture refers to believers on earth (Acts 9:32; Romans 1:7) and in heaven (Matthew 27:52). Throughout Church history, (though) it has been used to designate one set apart as especially holy (e.g., St. Paul, St. Francis of Assisi).” But again, the term refers to all believers, both those in heaven and those on earth, including you.

This title is not one which any of you deserves. You have no right to claim that you are a “saint,” much less a child of God. Of yourselves, you are slaves to your sin as we heard last weekend: “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.” But “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”—and so He has. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to die in your place so that your sins would be forgiven. He died in your place so that you could be a child of God and one of His saints. He was rejected by the Father in your place so that you might be accepted by the Father. That’s the love the Father has given to us, so that “we should be called children of God; and so we are” in Christ’s death, and especially in His resurrection.

Once Jesus died in your place and mine, God the Father raised Him from the dead on the Third Day, showing that He had accepted His Son’s sacrifice in our place. For this reason, we are titled saints and are called the children of God. But is this life the one for which we are called to hope in Christ? Why do we so often find no place of comfort in this world?

### Verse 2

“The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know (God). Beloved, we are God’s 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.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today you are children of God. That is why the world does not know you. Jesus told us that those who follow Him would have challenges in our Gospel text from the Beatitudes. He said, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” We are indeed God’s children now, but “what we will be has not yet appeared.”

These words may have you begin thinking “I’m but a stranger here, Heav’n is my home”, but that’s only part of the story. In chapter six of Revelation—just prior to our First Reading for this morning—those in the white robes are depicted as praying to God, crying out “with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge...?’” Being in heaven is not the end of the story: there is more to come. Judgment is to come, but then, after that, the glories of Revelation 21 when God will “wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things (will have) passed away.” Even further, our bodies will be changed in “the twinkling of an eye” and we will see God with our own glorified eyes alongside Job.

That is the end for which we hope and endure—being with God for all eternity in glorified bodies where there will be no more pain—*not* having our bodies taken away and living without them in heaven for all time. When we shall see God as He is, and yes even our Savior from sin, Jesus the Christ, “we shall be like him” having a resurrected and glorified body. These things we know by the faith God has given us when He called us as His children.

### Verse 3

“(E)veryone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

Now hearing this verse, you might think: Pastor, how is it that last Sunday we celebrated Luther who showed us that we are saved by grace alone, and now this verse seems to say that we must purify ourselves? Which is it? Are we saved by grace alone or by works?

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone as Scripture alone tells us. It is in this truth we have our hope, but as we heard earlier, we are not able to hope this way of ourselves. We are sinners who need a Savior. Jesus has come to be that Savior; and He sent us His Spirit so that we might be able to hope in Him. So then it is by the Spirit's work that we are able to hope in Christ Jesus. It is by this hope, worked in us by the Holy Spirit, that we are made pure. So it is the Holy Spirit's work to purify us, not our own; and that's what God through John is telling us in this passage.

For this reason, we know that we have eternal life. As the Explanation of the Small Catechism puts it: "Even as I now believe in Christ my Savior, I also know that I have been chosen to eternal life out of pure grace in Christ without any merit or worthiness of my own and that no one can pluck me out of His hand." And again, "God gives eternal life to me and all believers in Christ." And because we know this through His Spirit, we know that "(a)t the time of death, (our) soul(s...will be) immediately with Christ in heaven." But more than that, "(a)t the Last Day (we) believers, in both body and soul, will begin the full enjoyment of being with Christ forever." "This is most certainly true' ...Because all that (we) confess in this article are plainly taught in the Bible and therefore (we) firmly believe it." In Jesus' Name. Amen.