

# I Can Only Imagine

I John 3:1-3

## Introduction

One of the television icons of the 1970's was the character of Fonzi – on Happy Days – played by Henry Winkler. A little known fact about Henry is that his parents immigrated to the United States in 1939 from Berlin Germany. Henry's Father was an executive in a company that imported and exported lumber – he told the government he was needed on business in the U.S for about 6 weeks. Being Jews – they did not return to Germany. All of their relatives ended up dying in the holocaust.

Henry's father was even able to smuggle his wife's jewelry out of the country by melting down a box of chocolate and covering the jewels with the chocolate – that gave him money to restart his business in NY.

Happy Days launched Henry into superstar status

It was the # 1 show in 1976 and #2 in 1977 – so the Fonz was eminently recognizable to the public

One day around Christmas, 1977 – Henry and his wife Stacy were walking down Madison Ave. – and noticed Paul McCartney walking towards them. Henry was thrilled to see him – he had been a huge Beatles fan like everyone else – but he was almost speechless when Paul stopped and looked at him and said in his British accent – 'The Fonz'

The three of them stood and talked for a minute – were beginning to attract attention on the street. One woman came up and asked: 'Can I just stand here?' - - - Paul said: 'We're having a conversation – No!' - - - then another woman comes up with a rose for each of them. Then Paul gives Fonzi his card and tells him to call and they can hang out. Which the Fonz did call several times – but never heard back. [snubbed by Paul McCartney!]

Henry says he got a chance to meet Mick Jagger later – and he babbled like an idiot in his presence.

Even stars can be starstruck

In this next section of John's letter -he reminds us of an incredible meeting that will take place involving every true Christian

Yes – we will someday meet some of the most fascinating people from history - - - the Apostle Paul / Peter / John / Mary and Joseph / Abraham / David / Moses – Calvin / Luther

But that's not the meeting John is talking about

He says that we will someday see Jesus – face to face

What will that be like?

Mercy Me wrote a popular song titled – ‘I can only Imagine’

Will I stand in your presence?  
To my knees will I fall  
Will I sing hallelujah?  
Will I be able to speak at all?

I can only Imagine

Part of the mystique of our meeting with Christ – will be the fact that we will be changed by the encounter

I John 3:2 - 'Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.'

John wants to turn our attention to this grand event – in our passage this morning

Theologians sometimes call this the Beatific Vision – the appearance of the glorified Christ

When we see Jesus – things will not go back to the way they’ve always been

No – we will be changed / we will be transformed into our glorified / resurrected bodies

For the Christian - The best is yet to come – and John says there is great value in fixing our minds on such realities

C.S. Lewis: 'There are far better things ahead than any we leave behind.'

### I. Children of God - v. 1

John expresses amazement at the love of God that would redeem sinners

People sometimes like to turn this around – “boy, we must be worth an awful lot for God’s Son to die for us”

Mark Lowry – of the Gaither Vocal Band

Mark Lowry: 'Jesus thought you were worth dying for. How rude of you not to agree with Him.'

Is there anything wrong with that?

That seems to run counter to the thrust of Paul’s point in Romans 5 that Christ did not die for worthy people

Imagine singing: 'I am worthy! - - - because Jesus thought I was worth it - - - NO!!!

Romans 5:7 - 'For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.'

Romans 5:8 - 'But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

The death of Christ points to God's amazing love for unworthy sinners

C.S. Lewis: 'God did not die for man because of some value He perceived in him . . . As St. Paul writes, to have died for valuable men would have been not divine but merely heroic; but God died for sinners. He loved us not because we were lovable, but because He is love.'

Why is the love of God so marvelous?

Because there is nothing in us to make us worthy of that love and goodness

The wonder of it all!

John points to this idea that the world does not recognize anything particularly special about Christians

Think of the parable of the tares and the wheat - - - physically there is not much of a difference seen outwardly between a Christian and an unbeliever - - - no halo over our heads / no aura of glory surrounding us - - - we do not walk on water / - we get sick like everybody else – and even die

Certainly – there are differences in character and priorities – but these are not differences that the world is inclined to recognize or see the value of

I heard one comedian joking about her parents and how out of touch they were – they are Christians and they *still believe* that gay marriage is a sin - - - she said – it's like they skipped a Microsoft update or two

The world does not understand why a Christian does the things they do

Recently – pastor Alistair Begg – responded to a question on a podcast about whether a Christian grandma should attend the wedding of her transgender son or daughter

Begg answered the question – basically said – yes – as long as the grandson knows her position on his lifestyle / and buy a gift – otherwise – we are just seen as judgmental

Well – that has erupted in firestorm in the Christian world - - -

American Family Radio has stated they will no longer air his broadcasts after ten years

"At American Family Association, we believe it to be an act of unfaithfulness to God to attend a ceremony that celebrates any union outside of the biblical model of marriage as being between one man and one woman. Members of our leadership team held a call with Alistair Begg's team and were unsuccessful in convincing them of his error."

Various others are beginning to weigh in

Rosaria Butterfield – a former lesbian – now Christian who is married to a man says – ‘No – you should not attend a wedding ceremony of a marriage that God does not recognize as a marriage’

i.e. – two men getting married is not marriage / etc.

Whatever friction that creates is simply the cross we are called to bear as Christians

G.K. Chesterton: "We shall soon be in a world in which a man may be howled down for saying that two and two make four, in which furious party cries will be raised against anybody who says that cows have horns, in which people will persecute the heresy of calling a triangle a three-sided figure, and hang a man for maddening a mob with the news that grass is green."

We can't avoid that - - there is a cost in being faithful to Christ in a hostile world - - - but we know when Christ returns - - - it will not be the people who were angry at Christians who will be rejoicing - - - it will be the children of God who walked in His light

## II. The Best is Yet to Come - v. 2

Here John points to this radical change that awaits the believer

He says that we now are children of God – that is reality now - - - but the ultimate glorification is not yet

He connects all this with the beatific vision – we shall see Him as He is

Paul describes it this way to the Corinthians

I Corinthians 15:51, 52 - 'Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last

trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.'

Our destiny is to become conformed to the image of Christ – the transformation will be instantaneous

Rom. 8:29 - 'He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son.'

This is creation come full circle – plus!

We were originally made in the image of God – the Fall occurred – and what we find today is a distorted image / damaged by the Fall

Ecclesiastes 7:29 - 'Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.'

There is none good / none righteous / none who seek for God

The world is a broken place - we see sin / corruption / greed / immorality / impurity / sexual perversions / blasphemy / idolatry / violent crime / war / genocide

We ourselves – battle the weakness of the flesh  
We face temptation – we stumble  
We still get sick and die

What will it be like – to be conformed to the image of Christ?

John says, 'stop and think about it!'

It will be something beyond anything we have experienced up to this point in our relationship with God

There is a glory yet to be revealed

I Cor. 2:9 - 'But as it is written, Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.' [Kjv]

Part of that glory is what takes place to us - - our bodies resurrected / glorified

Phil. 3:20-21 - 'For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.'

Right now – we live in the period of the ‘not yet’

Paul and John both connect the transformation of believers with the return of Christ

For the Christian – this world is as bad as it gets - - - everything after is summed up under the word, ‘glory’. - - the best is yet to come

Reflecting on this truth puts life circumstances in their proper perspective

‘life’s trials will seem so small – when we see Christ’

Maybe you’ve been agonizing over something – some worry / some concern

When Christ returns – will that matter?

**Rom. 8:18 - 'For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us.'**

Corrie Ten Boom was doing just that – when she was at a publisher’s convention – and she saw a new Christian author – named Joni Earackson – sitting there in her wheelchair

Joni – having been paralyzed from a diving accident at the age of 17

Corrie ran over to greet her and grasped her hand and said to Joni: ‘One day, my friend, we’ll be dancing together because of the Lord Jesus.’

Think of what is to come

Bodies free of sin / free of weakness / susceptibility to disease and death

No more being tempted or bothered by Satan

**I Corinthians 13:12 - 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.'**

We will have an understanding of God’s ways far beyond what we see now

Right now – we are in the middle of the story – and don’t always see what God is up to

That is one of the greatest struggles Christians face in this life – is sometimes trying to interpret the events of providence

Why did this painful experience have to happen?

Why did we lose the baby? / Why did the car accident occur?

We don't have all the answers yet – we have faith

Where reason cannot wade – faith swims

There is a little parable that reflects upon this truth

'A king had a male servant who always said to him: "My king, do not be discouraged because everything God does is perfect, and He makes no mistakes." One day, they went hunting and a wild animal attacked the king. The servant managed to kill the animal but couldn't prevent the king from losing a finger. Furious and without showing any gratitude, the king said; "If God was good, I would not have been attacked and have lost one finger". The servant replied: "Despite all these things, I can only tell you that God is good and everything He does is perfect; He is never wrong."

'Outraged by the response, the king ordered that the servant be imprisoned. Later, the king left for another hunt and was captured by savages who used human beings as sacrifice. On the altar, the savages discovered that the king did not have one finger in place, and released him because they considered him too "incomplete" to be offered to their gods. On returning to his palace, the king authorized the release of his servant and told him: "My friend, God was really good to me. I was almost killed but for lack of a single finger, I was let go." "However, I have a question," the king added. "If God is so good, why did He allow me to put you in prison?" The servant wisely replied: "My king, if I had gone with you, I would have been sacrificed because I have no missing finger."

Now we see as in a mirror dimly – but then face to face

One day we will be perfectly without sin!

Morally – we will be without sin

Intellectually – without falsehood or error

Physically – without flaws or imperfections / weaknesses

Socially – we'll be surrounded by others who have been transformed the same as ourselves

John – in the book of Revelation gives a description of what theologians refer to as the eternal state – the blessedness of believers in the New Heaven and New Earth

Central to that blessedness is seeing the face of Christ

Revelation 22:1, 2 - 'And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the Tree of Life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.'

Revelation 22:3-5 - 'And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.'

This all begins with Christ's return

Colossians 3:4 - 'When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.'

John Piper: 'Let yourself imagine just slightly what that hour will be like. We do not know with detail or precision what the moment of His coming will be like. But only the slightest effort to imagine it overwhelms us . . . there will be nothing - absolutely nothing - imaginary about it. It will be raw reality. For the first time in our lives, sight will replace belief in the unseen. The magnitude of it will be such as to make our hearts feel like exploding. In ourselves, we will have no capacities for fathoming this event. It will stagger us.'

### III. Sanctification - v. 3

John says we are to fix our hope here

Holiness is not something we pursue on our own – or even in and of itself - - - but it flows from our living union with Christ as Savior / Redeemer

In Scripture – holiness is the logical outflow of authentic faith

Jesus is the One who has set us free from chains of sin

I am to be holy because I am a child of God and my Father is holy

That process will come to completion at the return of Christ

### Conclusion

We are not children of God by virtue of being born into this world

We come into this world with a sin nature / hostile to God / ultimately children of the devil

We are brought into the family – thru faith in Christ Jesus



John 1:11-12 - 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.' [KJV]

Those who receive Him not – remain outside the family of God

Those who receive Him – are brought into the family

Joni Earackson: 'I may have suffered with Christ on earth, but one day in heaven I'm going to reign with Him. I may have tasted the pains of living on this planet, but one day I'm going to eat from the tree of life in the pleasure of heaven, and it's all going to happen in the twinkling of an eye. The Lord's overcoming of this world will be the lifting of the curtain on our five senses, and we shall see Him and we shall be like Him.'