

The love of the Father

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[0 : 00] This is going to be on the screen most of the time because it is the theme of the message and it's such a great verse. It's a slightly different translation to the 1984 NIV.

This is the latest version of the NIV which I think is even more helpful. See what great love the Father has lavished on us.

We should be called children of God and that is what we are. Heavenly Father we pray that as we look at your words that you would give us the help of your spirit.

These are words that have come truly from yourself and we pray that we might understand with a measure of depth and with a measure of seriousness, a measure of greatness.

The passages of your word that you set before us. Help us with this particular verse. Help us to understand more about yourself. May our love and devotion to you be kindled afresh we pray in Jesus name.

[1 : 18] Amen. Well those of you here last week recall that we looked at a passage in Isaiah chapter 6 where the prophet Isaiah was given a vision of the Lord in the temple.

Just remember how last week we were thinking about the greatness of that vision. And in particular we saw that Isaiah had an encounter with a holy God.

The God with whom we deal is a holy God. We saw that holiness in the Bible is not only and primarily about moral purity but it's about otherness.

And that the God, the God, the God, the God, the true God is a God who is other than his creation. There have been many perversions of thinking about God as if God was part of his creation. It was in a tree or a mountain or a stream.

[2 : 30] That is so unlike the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is outside of his creation. And the God of the Bible is a holy God.

We saw that when any person encounters the God who is really there and has any sense of the holiness of this God, the only fit and right response to that is one of a sense of utter unworthiness. And that's exactly how Isaiah felt when God gave him that vision. He felt unfit. He felt unclean. He felt he had no right to be in the presence of God.

And all that is so true because he knew himself to be a sinful person. How wonderful in that same vision that the holy God commands his angel, the seraphim.

He brings a coal from the altar, puts it on the lips of Isaiah and he says, your sin is atoned for. This holy God, though other than his creation, wants to have fellowship with his creatures.

[4 : 03] It's a beautiful thing, isn't it? And he makes it possible by a sacrifice. There is an altar. A price has been paid.

A life has been given up into death. Blood has been shed. And it's because of that, that an unclean person, whoever they be, all of us may come near to a holy God because of the price that's been paid.

It's an amazing provision. We're not met here today to receive the judgment of God, but freshly, again, to receive his merciful forgiveness.

pause in our hearts and just be so grateful for that knowledge. But there's more to be said.

God is one, but God is three. There is a mysterious, but deeply true, revealing of God as God of, as one, and God as three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[5 : 34] And over the next three Sundays, we're going to be looking at these three persons of God and something to do with the character of each of the three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This morning, we're going to be thinking of the love of the Father. But we never move away from the Holy God.

We never move away from the vision of Isaiah in the temple. It's so important for us to remember that, that the God of the Bible is never inconsistent with himself.

It's one of the grand characteristics of God that he is unchangeable. It's a really sad and tired perversion where people say the Old Testament is about a God of wrath and the New Testament is about a God of love.

That's completely unfounded. We should never entertain that thought at all because it's exactly the same God that Isaiah encountered in Isaiah 6 who is the God who reveals himself as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 03] And the God of whom it said God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. It's the same God.

It's the same holy God. God and we need to treasure this unity this understanding so that we should see just how great our God is.

The God who is so other from us should love us so much as to send his son into this world. The love of God is spoken about constantly and copiously in the Bible and in particular in the writings of John the Apostle and in this letter that we have before us this morning the word love appears again and again and again both the love of God and the love that Christians should have for one another and in one place 1 John 4 16 John says God is love already quoted John 3 16 to you this morning but it's interesting to see in the Bible that whilst it is true to say that the spirit is love and even more true to say that the son of God is love and demonstrates love it seems to be in the Bible revelation a peculiar feature of the father that he should be described as the father of love and that's what we're going to be thinking about this morning and indeed this is what John himself talks about in this in this verse see what great love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God that is what we are I don't know whether you realize as we read through that passage this morning which is quite dense and in fact quite troubling as a passage but suddenly we come across this verse and it's like a spring of water in a desert place in a way and I was struck by this that here is John almost putting his pen down at this point we'll talk a little bit later in this message about why he has needed to write us as he does write here but he just puts his pen down here and he speaks as somebody who is not just giving us objective truth this morning but as someone who has personally experienced the love of God in his life and he just stops he says how great is the love the father has lavished on us

I just love that moment it's a reminder to us that these writers they're not interested in just a philosophical position about the truth but they're people who have very very deeply experienced God in their lives and it causes them to stop and to wonder Christianity is about exclamation marks you've got two of them up on the screen there I don't mean that in a sort of literalistic sense that if you were to read the original language you'd find the exclamation marks but I'm just saying that you can't really have Christianity without exclamation marks it is not a dead flat it is not just something to be said we do we do not come here just simply to exchange truth but as I was reminding you earlier as you stand up at the beginning you sing the song you sing the song of the redeemed grace because we are deeply privileged people who have encountered the holy

[11 : 58] God and found him to offer mercy and grace that instead of judgment we have received mercy so we stand and sing amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me I once was lost but now I'm found was blind but now I see thank you John Newton but he speaks for all of us doesn't he he speaks for all of us we pick up our song books and we say yes that's that's for me that's my experience it is the definition of being a Christian that we have actually experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ and so there is this exclamation mark about our lives exclamation mark about what we know and understand that's why we have to stop and wonder as well as now but let!

let me just set a bit of context here because we did read a whole passage I could have just read one John three one and two this morning but there is a passage in which this is set and really the whole of this book is to be understood in the context of a very deep struggle which is taking place for the souls of men and women in John's time and he's writing it in a time of crisis and conflict so did you notice maybe you found it rather alarming I read chapter 2 verse 18 this is the last hour you have heard that the antichrist is coming even now many antichrists have come and you're thinking of all those bad films and things that sort of crop up and have that sort of figure of the antichrist really unhelpful but

John is using this language because it's deeply real and it's actually far more serious than the sort of filmology that's out there and it's a time of crisis people who had once been in the church had now left chapter 2 verse 19 they went out from us but they did not really belong to us if they had belonged to us they would have remained with us but their going showed that none of them belonged to us so we don't know how many congregations might have been affected in that way but I want you to think of it in this way that there were people who were gathering together and a whole bunch of them had left the church it wasn't to do with issues of personality and many of the things that sometimes afflict churches in that way no it was because of their beliefs fundamentally and what John is very very keen to address here these people didn't believe that

Jesus was really human so I want you to notice a particularly interesting set of verses in chapter 4 verses 2 and 3 this is how you can recognize the spirit of God every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God but every spirit does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God this is the spirit of the antichrist which you have heard is coming as even now already in the world seems a bit puzzling to us what's he getting at well we understand from this that there was a particular heresy abroad at that time which continued for the first 200 years of the church's life which was that people said flesh is bad flesh is evil it's only the spirit which is good therefore God could not have come in flesh therefore it only appeared that Jesus was a man therefore he didn't really die upon the cross it only appeared so therefore he didn't really rise from the dead it only appeared so this is very serious this drives at the heart of the gospel message it is absolutely necessary for the gospel for our salvation that

God's own son should come from heaven and should become a man and should take on human nature that he should live a human life in obedience to his father that he should actually die upon a cross that real blood should be spilt that a real death should occur and that a real resurrection should happen so that now at the right hand of God is the man Christ Jesus who is coming again in his glorified body to raise up all of us with glorified bodies as well because flesh is not evil it is sin which is evil and John is very concerned that people should not have these false sub gospel views of

[18:20] Jesus Christ this is not just a matter of words this is not just a matter of semantics he is very concerned that they should hear a clear true gospel message and as I was preparing this sermon I was thinking do you know what I would like to preach another sermon but it won't be today but it will be on the!

of the importance of hearing the truth of God in order for us to receive a true salvation this matters it matters that you hear clear bible based truth in order for you to be saved and it matters for you to for your salvation to carry on that you hear clear bible based truth that is what God blesses that is what is absolutely essential and it's the reason why John he says of these people although they were in a church setting yet they actually left the church and he goes on to talk about these people as in verse 10 of chapter 3 this is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are this seems so politically incorrect for us to even talk in this sort of language but it is the Bible's language and it says about these people who have had who have been led astray and I want to draw your attention to that word as well chapter 2 verse 26 I'm writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray and also in chapter 3 verse 7 dear children do not let anyone lead you astray there are temptations for us to be led astray because there are false teachers and false teaching and we all of us are in danger and so John warns us by the Holy Spirit don't be led astray don't be led astray this way only leads to disaster to judgment if you were to follow these false ways he goes further than just saying it's not just a matter of believing something different but he says if you're not properly converted by the true gospel then you're not going to properly live the

Christian life as it ought to be lived that's why he has so much to say about the importance of loving the brothers because one of the accusations that he levels about this group who have received a bad gospel is that they don't have a love for the brethren and he says apply the tests apply the tests this is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are it's a vital battle it had to be fought in his time it has to be fought in our time in fact it has to be fought in every age of the Christian church and the great advances in Christian thinking have always occurred as a result of having to fight these battles over the truth this is why the great councils of the Christian church needed to meet in the early centuries this particular issue was dealt with at the council of Chalcedon AD 451 and something it took years to sort this out these battles to take place and so

these battles need to be fought and so we're coming right up to present time and here he is and John is saying in the midst of this battling in the midst of this crisis in the midst of this concern that he has had as he sees a church split if you like as he sees the dangers that are being faced he says how great is the love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God because he sees that not everybody is a child of God this is his language this is his language in chapter 3 verse 10 this is how we know who the children of God are who the children of the devil are if we're children of God here today is because we're deeply privileged deeply privileged God has made a distinction God has drawn us out of one condition and brought us into another and that's why we say see the greatness of the love that the father has lavished on us and it's a fair question to ask of ourselves it's a fair question to ask of anyone here today are you a child of [23 : 58] God or a child of the devil do you want to be a child of God do you want to be in his family we'll ask God for mercy that he might open your eyes to see the provision that he has made in Jesus Christ so that you might call upon him I want to briefly touch on three aspects of this love of the father the love of the father for us firstly the father has a past love how great is the love the father has lavished on us in the original Greek this is the aires tense which is a great tense we don't have it in English in quite the same way which says something God has done in the past which carries on into the present something God has done in the past it carries on into the present the father has a past love the father has lavished a love upon us when did he lavish his love upon us how far back do you need to go to find out about the lavish love of

God when did God think about you when did he have you in his mind when did he have an intention to show love towards you well the Bible is beautifully plain on this point and I encourage you to turn up Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 to 6 page 1173 praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ for he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves here we see Paul expressing in this particular section of Ephesians the fact that this is all the choosing of God in the past look closely verse four he chose us in him in Christ before the creation of the world that's where the blessing starts that's where the love has to be traced back to it's before the creation of the world before anything that any of us has been conscious of has been made we have received love from God he's lavished his love upon us it's an electing love it's a lavish love it's a self giving love and God put that love upon us before the creation of the world it's a beautiful beautiful thing he chose to love us if you're a Christian here today it's because

God set his love upon you before the creation of the world secondly the father's present love you can turn over the page to Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 5 apostle John says with a sense of wonder that is what we are that is what we are here present day flesh and blood sitting in this hall today we're children of God that is what we are God's past plan brought into present action as for you you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient all of us who lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts like the rest we were by nature objects of wrath just stop the reading there just make this point here so here is this amazing dichotomy on the one hand God has set his love upon us from before the creation of the world in an unchangeable absolutely certain way everyone whom God has set his love on way back then those will become the children of God but but but the writer here says we didn't start off life like that we started life off just like everybody else in this world we were by nature children of wrath objects of wrath under God's judgment we were sinners we were rebelling against God didn't want his ways that's how all of our lives have started we were dead in our transgressions and sins we used to live in one way verse 4 but because of his great love for us

[29 : 56] God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved so when Jesus Christ died upon the cross he died for sinful people he died for our sins uncleanness and that has been revealed to us in time so it's the same apostle who says in his gospel John chapter 1 and verse 12 to those who believed on his name he gave the right to become the children of God all who received him to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God just give you one more verse to look at 1

Peter 2 and verse 10 once you were not a people but now you are the people of God once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy John in another place says this wasn't by a human decision this wasn't by a human birth this wasn't by a water of baptism this wasn't by some sort of inheritance you got from your parents this is simply the grace of God that's been revealed to you in time so there came a day when your eyes were opened you saw your need and you recognized that the only place for help for forgiveness for a sinner is found in Jesus Christ and him crucified and that's the work of the Holy Spirit if that's happened in your life it's the work of the Holy Spirit praise God but the father's love is not just one thing of the past nor is it just of the present but the father has lavished his love upon us well into the future and turn again to Ephesians 1 and verse 4 and it says he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight there's a beautiful picture of it later in the same letter we're writing to husbands Paul says husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless so our lives are an unfinished story John talks about how the world doesn't recognize us and indeed it doesn't recognize us just that it didn't recognize the Lord Jesus but there's coming a day when the children of God are going to be recognized Romans 8 speaks about how the creation is looking forward to the revealing of the children of God and so we're on this passageway where God is doing his gracious sanctifying work in our lives and we're so blessed and privileged to be under his hand in that way that he's taking us forward day by day as Paul says in another place change from one degree of glory to another that's why we have spiritual ambition because what we are now is not what we shall be God has grand wondrous purposes for us and he says that when he appears we shall be like him the appearing of Jesus Christ will be a time when he will not look upon us as a bride who is full of spots and wrinkles but one who is blameless and beautiful and it's a beautiful thought for each one of us we're a puzzle and a contradiction to ourselves a disappointment to ourselves but there's a future hope that because of the lavish love of God we are going to be holy and blameless in his sight something to be looked forward to something that reaches back into the mists of time and before time and reaches forward into the depths of eternity so we say with the apostle John see what love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God that is what we are sing this closing song come praise and glorify our God those Thank you.