

The Father's Love

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[0 : 0 0] Before we come to look at God's Word, let's pray together. Loving God our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word.

We thank you that your Word reveals yourself to us. And we pray that this evening, that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you would come and make your Word a living Word to our hearts, and to our souls.

Father, that for whatever reason we are here this evening, Father, we pray that we would hear no other voice but the voice of Almighty God. And Father, we pray that in the Scriptures, you would reveal yourself to us in all your majesty, and in all your glory, and in all your splendor.

That Jesus Christ be lifted up. And Lord, that he has promised that if he is lifted up, then he will draw men and women and boys and girls to himself.

So be with us, we pray. Accept us as we are. Whatever our background, whoever we are, whatever burdens we carry this evening, however disappointed we are with our own lives, with the way we live our lives, whatever is in our lives at this moment that is causing us strife and grief.

[1 : 2 6] Father, we pray that we would indeed move our ear to listen to you, to hear what you say. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. As you read the New Testament account about the life and the death of Jesus Christ, you can't be but drawn to the peculiar way in which God the Father and his love is manifested, working in the background, driving the Father's actions, and also revealing the Father's love.

And it's this angle I really want us to kind of focus on this evening. It's the area that I want us to probe, and in particular with relation to the cross.

Because the cross of Jesus Christ, the crucifixion, portrays time and time again the scene of the Father's action. And it's that perspective of the cross I want us to think about.

And I want us to think about for a few moments this evening. And I want to kind of tie it round that famous verse in John 3, 16, where that great love is revealed to us very clearly, very plainly.

[2 : 5 1] It actually couldn't be any plainer. Where Jesus says to this man Nicodemus, who had come to him, who was looking for eternal life, and Jesus bore testimony there to the Father's love when he says to Nicodemus, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus himself aware of the Father's actions, aware of the Father's love. Jesus is witness to these words.

He is the one more than anyone else who understands the Father's love. He is the one more than anyone else who is able to articulate it, as he did here to this man Nicodemus.

These words are recorded for us by John, but they are the words of Jesus. Jesus is telling Nicodemus about the magnificence and the magnitude of God the Father's love.

And he captures it all in that simple verse, but very profound verse. God the Father gave. God the Father loved.

[4 : 18] Even more, God the Father so loved. He loved in a certain way, and he loved in a certain measure. He loved extravagantly.

And what's really humbling is that the object of this love isn't Jesus. It's us. God so loved the world.

It's you. It's me. It's anyone who has ever lived and whoever will live. That is the focus of this love.

It is the world. And as I said, I wanted to look at this love, the Father's love, highlighting three aspects of it from this verse.

Looking at the evidence. You know, many people say, well, God doesn't care about me. God doesn't love me. God can't love me. All these things that are happening to me that he's allowing to happen.

[5 : 19] How can God love me if that's the case? That's not true. And the evidence is before us here of the Father's love for each one of us.

And the first part of the evidence that we find here so clearly is that the Father's love lies first of all in the greatness of the gift.

John tells us that God gave his only son. The authorised version puts it that he gave his only begotten son. And the chief thing about the son is his uniqueness.

He is his only son. There is no other son. He is God's son. Son.

He is God's only son. No angel ever has had and never will have such status.

[6 : 21] Not even the Holy Spirit is a son. Yet Christian believers become sons and daughters of the living God through faith in Jesus Christ.

That's what's so amazing. That when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, when we put our faith in his finished work on the cross, when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and we're adopted into the family of God, God's word tells us, declares, that we are then sons and daughters of the living God.

We are heirs and co-heirs with Christ. Absolutely staggering. Absolutely fantastic. But Christ is the only son.

What does that mean? Well, it means that all the Father's nature is in him. All that the Father is, the Son is.

He possesses all the characteristics of the Father. He's infinite. He's eternal. He's unchangeable. We're told in Scripture that he is the Father's express image.

[7 : 29] It's the brightness of his glory. Jesus mirrored the Father. You and I look in a mirror and we see ourselves. Jesus would look into a mirror and he would see God.

From the very moment that he was born, his mother Mary would look into the crib and she would be looking into the face of God in that small child. That's why Jesus could say, he who has seen me has seen the Father.

All that the Father is, the Son is. As we know from our catechism, in him dwelt the Godhead, all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily.

For the characteristic of his uniqueness as a son is that he was uniquely loved. There is a special and eternal bond between father and son and our human love is just a faint copy of that perfect love that exists within the Godhead.

So even for love, for human love and the capacity to love, we should be giving thanks to God. because that's where it originates. Our love will never be perfect like their love.

[8 : 45] But we can love because of it, because we are created in God's image. John reminded us in the opening words of his gospel that the word was with God.

And the word with here doesn't mean he was beside him. For instance, in the sense that I could say if I was walking down the street with my son, I could say I was with my son walking down the street.

I'm meaning my son is in close proximity to me. That's not what John is meaning here at all. The image he's putting across here the right meaning of this word is that the word was towards God.

They lived in relationship. They lived towards each other all the time. They existed face to face in a dynamic loving relationship.

Their hearts mutually and continuously went out towards one another. Their life, their whole being was for the other.

[9 : 51] The son's love went out to the father and the father's love came out and went out to the son. It was a perfect relationship. Now the reason I'm saying all this is that all this must be borne in mind when we think of Calvary.

Behind God's love for the world was his love for the son. God so loved the world but he also so loved his son.

never was there nor will there be a son more lovable. Never was there or will there be a father more affectionate.

And when God was offering Jesus Christ on the cross he was still loving him. He was experiencing the fulfillment of his own words to Abraham when he said to Abraham take your son your only son Isaac whom you love sacrifice him as a burnt offering.

In his giving God gave his best his best that he loved exquisitely and the sacrifice of Calvary is only made possible through the sacrifice of the father of his love for the son.

[11 : 24] The evidence of the father's love for a fallen world is in the greatness of the gift. The second element in the father's love is that he gives his son unreservedly.

when God gives his son he holds absolutely nothing back. The giving is limitless and open ended.

Now this is a marked contrast to the way that God deals with his people. For believers there is always a limit to the pain to the distress to the discomfort to the anguish that we will feel.

God has set parameters and once we have reached the parameters we will go no further. We see that for example in the life of Job when Satan tested Job and afflicted him.

Job trusted God and God was there for him. He said parameters to Satan. He said you can go so far in testing him but no further. Yes he can lose his wife his family his livestock his home his living but I am setting parameters and you will not go beyond that.

[12 : 49] And we see the same principle through in the New Testament in Paul's life. Remember Paul with the thorn in his flesh and he came to God and he asked God God I want rid of this help me take this away from me.

We don't know what it was but it clearly afflicted Paul. And what does God say? God says to him, Paul, my grace is sufficient for you.

My strength is made perfect in your weakness. Paul, I have set parameters. parameters. This will not consume you. This will not destroy you. And I'm sure there are many of us here tonight that bear testimony to that, that have gone through affliction and difficulties.

But God has not given up on us. God has set parameters. God has not put anything into our lives that we haven't been able to bear because of his grace, because of his goodness.

But for his son, Jesus Christ, there is no limits. There is no boundary set.

[14 : 00] He is to be the Holocaust. He is to be totally exposed and vulnerable. He will have no advocate to stand up for him.

At Calvary on the cross, there was nobody to say stop, no further. He has had enough. No one to say enough is enough.

For the eternal God and the eternal son, there was no voice to say as it did for Abraham and Isaac. Do not lay a hand on the boy.

No last minute intervention. And of course we know why that is, don't we? We know that no substitute can take Christ's place.

He came to tramp that wine press alone. There was no other good enough to take the place of sin.

[15 : 04] No one else who could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. No alternative sacrifice. salvation is you know, we live in a world where folk are looking for alternative gospels, for alternative salvations, salvation in a whole load of things.

Yet we have a salvation here, a salvation which is completely unique, a salvation that involved the Son of God giving himself to the uttermost.

Just imagine if we had been involved in the planning of Jesus coming into the world. Well, of course, straight away we'd be dead against it, wouldn't we?

We would totally oppose the idea. How absurd that God's Son should come into a world like this, should make a journey and come here. He compromises himself straight away.

the very fact that he would take upon himself humanity and human flesh was a compromise. His very presence in the world would be a diplomatic nightmare.

[16 : 23] But suppose we were persuaded and the visit was to go ahead. What conditions would we have laid down? Well, after all, when the rare occasion when the queen or royalty comes to store, we know what happens.

there are very stringent guidelines as to her visit. There will be nothing to inconvenience her. Everything is laid on for her.

Buildings are painted and the roads are, the portals are done up. It doesn't happen any other time, but it happens when the queen comes. All these things, this great activity, because it's the queen who's coming.

nothing will be there to embarrass her when she arrives. Any potential troublemakers will be kept away.

And in no way will she, if Dornway has a dark place, a dark side, a dark community, in no way will she be taken in there. Because we don't want her embarrassed by what she sees or what she hears.

[17 : 31] And of course, there'll be nothing there to endanger her. She'll have her own private body guards and extra police will be drafted in. Well, the same would be the case if we were involved in planning the advent, the coming of Jesus into the world.

We would say he can go, but there must be no poverty. He must have everything that he needs. There must be no pain. We wrap him up in cotton wool.

We make sure that nothing happens to him. And there must be no temptation. And of course, there must be nothing frightening. And of course, he will only visit those who will accept him and honor him.

Death, of course, would be unthinkable. And as for the curse of the cross and abandonment, that would just be absolutely ridiculous.

Because even a Roman soldier and a Roman citizen couldn't be crucified, let alone the Son of God. That's what we would want, and rightly so.

[18 : 49] however, look at what extent the Father gave his Son, whom he loved.

He gave him to the uttermost, to extreme limits. He gave him to the impossible and to the unthinkable. Have you ever actually spent time to think about all the things that Jesus went through, not just in his lifetime, but also in his death.

The Son of God, adored and worshipped by angels, the host of heaven at his beck and call, the creator of all the ends of the earth.

And we find him stripped naked, abused, assaulted, hanging on a cross, with thieves, with robbers, a curse.

We're talking about Jesus here. We're talking about someone who had no sin, someone who had done absolutely nothing wrong, someone who didn't deserve what he got.

[20 : 06] he came to poverty, he came to the unthinkable, though he was rich, yet for our sakes, the Bible tells us, he became poor.

As the hymn writer puts it, hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered, the Jesus who could save foxes of holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man doesn't have a place to put down his head, because he was given to homelessness, he was given to pain and hunger and thirst and weariness, he was given to the point of the spear, the jabs of the thorns as he placed it upon his head, the agony of the nails and the torture of the cross.

He was given to shame and to abuse, to rejection, and the only voices that he could hear ringing in his ear was crucify him, crucify him, God the father didn't spare him, indeed he is the holocaust, and if the physical wanted enough, then he was also given over to the darkest of emotions, to sorrow and fear, to tears, to amazement and horror, and to the overwhelming sense in Gethsemane of the eeriness of the will of God.

Well, I hope you're not here tonight and in your mind you say at times God doesn't know when I go through. God doesn't understand the position I'm in.

Well, he does because we have a God who has been touched with all the feelings of our affirmatives and much, much more. We will never reach the depths of pain and suffering that Jesus did.

[22 : 40] God the Father gave him to the point at which the cup was virtually unbearable and he cries in the agony that this cup might be taken from him or that it might pass by him.

Oh, he knew that that wasn't possible. And God the Father gave him to death a death that was slow and dishonorable.

He gave him to taste it, to die consciously. He knew exactly what was happening all the time.

He died knowingly. He watched the soldiers at the foot of the cross casting lots for his clothes. He saw the crowds and heard them crying out against him.

he saw his followers, those who had cared for him, those who had loved him. He saw them walking away, disappearing in the distance.

[23 : 56] And he died and anesthetized, experiencing in his body every pain of this brutal form of execution.

And remember again who it is we're describing here. Remember who it is who we're thinking about. It's the King of Glory. It's the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Father gave him to dereliction, to the place where Jesus cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He who was with God came to be without God. Again, I wanted to remember Abraham here and Isaac. One of the finest refrains, I think, in the story, and is there twice.

It says, and the two of them went up together. Father and son, Abraham and Isaac. They went up together. The two of them went up together.

And all that way up that hill, Isaac would take comfort from his father's presence. Even as he lay bound on the altar, he was looking into the loving eyes of his father.

[25 : 13] Even as Abraham took the knife, the son was aware of the warmth love.

And you know the same is true of Jesus. As Christ set out on the long road from Bethlehem to Calvary, it was true of him and his father too.

They both went up together. All the way through the gospel, we find this right throughout Jesus' life, his healing and his miracles. It was to give glory to the father.

It was to reveal the father. It was to express the relationship they had, the love that they shared. All the way the father was with him.

In the temptation as the devil tempted him. What was Jesus' response? What was his defense? He went to the word of the father.

[26 : 15] Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of the Lord. At the transfiguration where he was there and he understood who he was as the beloved son of God.

Even in the garden, in Gethsemane, as he prayed and as he submitted to the father's will, he was aware of the father going up with him.

always the father would be with him. Even on the threshold of Calvary itself, this had been true.

Jesus told his disciples, I am not alone. The father who sent me is with me. And what great comfort and encouragement he must have drawn from that.

And we may believe that for most of the time that he was on the cross the same was true. The father was with him.

[27 : 21] They went up together. And he would draw comfort from that. He would draw courage from the knowledge of the father's love and the father's presence.

Everyone else had fled but the father was there. The father would always be there. But would he? Yet for a moment and we don't know how long towards the end God the father was not there.

The Lord is forsaken and the experience is all the more terrifying for its unfamiliarity. It had never happened before.

father and son had never ever been separated. Do you know that we could have born that moment better?

Many long years living without God without reference to God living in sin has almost trained us for it. Jesus had no training for that moment.

[28 : 35] God had always been there from the councils of eternity. Throughout eternity they had been face to face.

Even in the gathering gloom of these last days God the father was there. Now suddenly he's not. The saviour is without God. He was crying and God the father wasn't listening.

He was reaching out and he couldn't touch him. He couldn't touch the father. There was no help. There was no sense of his presence.

There was no assurance of his love. There was no assurance even that he was the father and he himself was the son.

The full torment mental and physical. the full separation from life and from God. The full experience of hell.

[29 : 42] Jesus endured. There have been times when I have been accused of preaching too much about sin.

I don't believe I have. I preach Christ crucified. Christ's amazing love. And the black back cloth that makes sense of that love.

That gives it understanding. That gives that love understanding is the black back cloth of human sin.

Because the love of God shines like a diamond against that back cloth. he who knew no sin became sin for us.

For Jesus here there is only darkness and the terrible pain and the sin the sin he bore our sin even the sin that he became he became sin for us.

[30 : 54] And when God the father recoils from him when he turns his back on him when he turns away from him when he separates himself from him he's not separating himself from the son he is separating himself from our sin that the son bore that is what your salvation and my salvation cost the Lord Jesus Christ and God the father we must remember the focus here John isn't speaking about what the son did he's speaking about what the father did God so loved the world that he gave for a moment he wants to think of Abraham not of Isaac not the cost to the victim but the cost to the offerer on the cross

God the father was offering up his only son and if we need proof of the father's love we need but to look at Calvary because Calvary is the proof of the father's love it was the cost the father bore for our freedom as he experienced himself something corresponding to the son's loss and as the son became anathema due to our sin so the father also felt and experienced the cost that had to be paid for that to happen God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself evidence of the father's love the greatness of the gift the extent of the giving and finally the evidence the third sign of the greatness of the father's love is the simplicity of its demand this is where we come in

God has done it all nothing else can be done nothing else has to be done God has done it all and the simplicity of its demand is that whoever believes in him whoever believes in this crucified and risen saviour Jesus Christ shall not perish but have eternal life could it be simpler Jesus paid the penalty he bore the cost he died in our place he died for our sins he endured hell for us so that we didn't have to endure hell for ourselves when we die it's amazing stuff it's amazing grace he didn't have to do it but he chose to do it for us and the simplicity of the demand is to believe oh we think we can contribute we think we need to do something to gain our own salvation well if we think that then

I'm afraid we're completely corrupting the atonement of Jesus Christ we're completely corrupting the cross we're negating for ourselves what Jesus has done on our behalf we can have all the money in the world I'm afraid we can't buy it we can have all the power in the world and I'm afraid we can't gain it we can even be the best person who has ever lived and still die without Christ and without hope and be lost lost for all eternity why because we have not believed I remember once there was a sign on a church door and I think it maybe gives us a good picture of certain individuals and it was about believing and the sign said does can't mean won't are you here tonight and you're saying well

I can't believe this just no I can't believe all this I can't believe that Jesus died for me I can't believe that Jesus died on the cross and suffered for me dealt with my sins is it that you can't or is it that stubbornness of heart where you're saying I won't I won't believe it the simplicity of the demand is to believe and that demand is is open to all that is a challenge for each one of us this is a challenge for everyone who will ever live is what are they going to do with this Jesus who is the Christ and if at the end of time when you enter into eternity if you do not end up in heaven if you don't make it to heaven it's not because

[36 : 57] Jesus has excluded you actually after tonight you have absolutely no excuse I'm sure you've heard this message umpting times from this pulpit and other pulpits but suddenly after tonight you have no excuse you know what Jesus has done for you and you're aware now of the simplicity of the demand that the onus on you is to believe to trust to come to Jesus in your sin to repent to confess to embrace him to say thank you to him thank you Jesus for loving me so much thank you God for sending your only son to die for me to die in my place so if in the end you don't make it to heaven there is no argument that you can present to God Jesus has not and will not exclude you you exclude yourself because you will not believe the amazing love of our

God the evidence is before us the greatness of the gift he gave his best he gave Jesus the extent of the giving through the cross Jesus has provided for us the perfect salvation and the simplicity of the demand he doesn't want us to go and become monks he doesn't want us to go and live in isolation he doesn't want us to go out and be perfect tomorrow because we can't he doesn't want us to give more to the church he doesn't want us even to try to be better people he wants us to believe and when we take that step of faith what he says to us is I'm going to give you someone to be with you someone who's going to mold you and change you someone who's going to help you become more and more like me

I'm going to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit he will come into your life and he'll change your life from the inside out he'll change your heart and gradually and slowly throughout the term of your lifetime I'll be changing you I'll give you new desires I'll want you to seek after godliness I'll change I'll change you that is Jesus' promise when we trust him when we obey when we believe and he also says to us see at the end whenever that day is going to be see when you die suddenly or slowly or at work or at home in your bed or in hospital wherever don't don't worry about it because I'll be there I'll be there with you and I'll be there for you and I'll take you to my heaven that I've prepared for you the simplicity of the demand is to believe let's pray together loving God our heavenly father take our feeble offerings tonight

Lord as we seek to grapple with your word as we seek to to see Jesus in your word father as we seek to to magnify him and extol him as we seek to see him in all his splendor and and all his glory and father I do pray that you would indeed melt hearts father I pray that the beauty of Jesus would be seen tonight and father that hearts would really seek after him oh father we thank you that you have done everything that we need we thank you for that perfect and full salvation and I pray father for your holy spirit to come and move amongst us even as we sing this last psalm father that you would speak to us that you would draw us to yourself call us effectually to you and change us and make us yours father I pray this in Jesus precious name amen our closing praise is psalm 40 psalm 40 and maybe you have been waiting for the lord your god maybe you've been waiting patiently even well we know that the lord is waiting and that the lord's arms are open we're going to sing psalm 40 to the tune balerma and we're going to sing verses one to four i waited for the lord my god and patiently did bear at length to me he didn't climb my voice and cry to hear let's sing that psalm and we're singing the traditional version of psalm 40 i waited for the lord my god and patiently did bear at length to me he did incline my voice and cry to hear he took me from a fearful bed and from the mighty clay and on a rock he set my feet establishing my way he put a new song in my mouth our god to magnify many shall see it and shall fear and on the lord rely oh oh blessed is the man whose trust upon the lord

relies respecting not the proud nor such a turn aside to life go in peace and may the grace of our lord jesus christ the love of god and the fellowship of the holy spirit rest and abide with us all and with all those who we love now and forever more amen to