

When Love Came Down

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Preacher: Rev Calum M Smith

[0 : 00] We're also going to be turning to another three verses as well, but we begin in Ephesians chapter 3. We've gathered here on Christmas Eve and we gather for a time of worship and a time of prayer.

But what is our prayer this evening? As we've heard prayers offered up and as we've been praying in our own hearts, what is our prayer?

I'm sure it's very similar to the prayer that we find of Paul here as he's writing to the church at Ephesus, and in particular at the end of this chapter, verse 14 to the end, it is a prayer offered up by Paul for the people he was writing to, but also for the wider church as well. He wasn't able to be with them at this time. He was writing to them from prison, and yet his heart was very much with them. He hadn't forgotten about them. They were on his mind and he was often praying for them.

But what does he pray for them and what is in our prayerful hearts this evening? Well, as you look through verse 14 down to the end of the chapter, as you read through Paul's prayer, what's interesting in some ways is what he doesn't pray for. He doesn't pray for physical, material, or financial needs.

He doesn't pray for persecution to be stopped or healing of the sick or these kinds of things, not because he never did, but because it's not what his focus is at this point.

[1 : 36] He prays that they might be filled first and foremost. As you look at verse 17 to 19 there, you see there, So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

That's the kind of prayer Paul offers. And we've heard in prayer this evening, and I'm sure we've offered up in prayer in our own quiet hearts as well, that kind of prayer for ourselves and for others around us.

And especially maybe as we think of this week, when there's a focus among many in the world on the coming of Jesus Christ, that people would grasp, that comprehend, that means lay hold of the wonder of the love of God towards us.

And what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. It's a prayer for ourselves first, that we might have this more and more in our own hearts, but it's also a prayer for all around us.

We prayed for family and for friends and for people far and wide throughout our community. I'm sure when you have the radio on just now, you're listening to songs coming through whatever device.

[3 : 12] So many songs that have that sense of a love song, full of love. And yet none of these songs can touch the depth of the love that we have in the Word of God.

The love that we see expressed here by Paul, the love that we sang of in Psalm 36, that steadfast love of the Lord, how precious is your steadfast love, what confidence it brings.

And then we find that shelter in the shadow of his wings. It's the love expressed in chapter 3 in these verses by Paul in his prayer for the people.

And what we're thinking of this evening, and as we think of Christmas Eve, and the incarnation of our Lord, the title, if you wish, I gave to our service this evening is When Love Came Down.

That's what we're going to think of, When Love Came Down. There's a hymn by Stuart Townend that has that title, When Love Came Down. When love came down to earth and made his home with men, The hopeless found a hope, the sinner found a friend.

[4 : 24] Not to the powerful, but to the poor he came, And humble, hungry hearts were satisfied again. When love came down to earth, when God sent his son into this world.

That we would not lose sight of the wonder of it, But always lay hold on it for ourselves, Comprehend it for ourselves, And pray that others would comprehend and lay hold of it too. Because in Jesus we see this love so amazing, This love so divine in his coming, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection.

We see the wonder of God's love to us. So that's what Paul is praying, That the people in Ephesus will grasp, This love that surpasses all knowledge.

We want to think about this love that we see in Ephesians By considering how we see it in other parts of scripture as well. And we're going to take three other verses Into the setting this evening as well.

[5 : 30] And think of just what kind of love this was That was shown towards us when love came down. And three things we're going to see. The love that left all behind. The love that bridges the divide.

And the love that gives life. That's the wonder of the love that came down to earth. So the first thing we see is the love that left all behind. What kind of love did the Lord Jesus show towards us? Well in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 9. The first of our three texts tying into Ephesians. 2 Corinthians 8 verse 9.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor. So that through his poverty, So that you through his poverty might become rich. The love that left all behind. When you read these verses, When the Lord Jesus, though he was rich, Immediately our minds, When we think of riches, We think of money.

[6 : 38] We think of finances. And he was rich, And yet he became poor. Yet it's not about that financial wealth at all. It's about relationship.

It's about what he had with his father in heaven. We'll read another text about it in a moment as well. But it's this relationship, This glory that he enjoyed with his father in heaven.

And he left it. He left it all behind when love came down to earth. He came into this world born as a man.

He humbled himself. It wasn't that he was rich financially that he left behind, But just the glory that he enjoyed with his father. He came in that humiliation, As it's so often described.

The humiliation of being a man, And being mocked, Being looked down upon, Not being received by his own. And yet it's this love that left all behind.

[7 : 41] It's a love that we see throughout the Old Testament, As God is making his promise, Through his covenant to his people. How he will be their God, He will be our God, And they we will be his people.

It's a love that bears all cost for us. So consider then what Jesus left behind for your sakes. As Paul describes it here, How he left all these things behind.

Though he was rich, Yet for your sake he became poor. Now Jesus is described in the Gospels, As the word that became flesh, And dwelt among us.

It's that idea where we see that Jesus, Came down for his people. He came down, From that perfect relationship in heaven, Into this broken world.

And when you think of the places he was, And the people he saw, And the lives he touched. He saw the world in all its horror, And all its sorrow, And sadness, And all its illness, And death.

[8 : 50] All of these things, Sin was there all around him. And yet he left all behind for that. He took the form of a servant. He took on him flesh as man.

He came to go through this world, To the place called Golgotha, The place of the skull, To suffer the cruelest of death. The most shameful death, That there was at the time.

We served for the worst of criminals. And yet here he was, Put to death on the cross. He was rich, Yet for his love, For his lost people, He became poor.

And the words that also describe this, Are in Philippians chapter 2. And again you see there, How Jesus left all behind. How he emptied himself, How he made himself nothing.

Philippians 2 verse 5, Have this mind among yourselves, Which is yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, Did not count equality with God, A thing to be grasped, But made himself nothing.

[10:02] Taking the form of a servant, Being born in the likeness of men, And being found in human form, He humbled himself, By becoming obedient to the point of death, Even death on the cross.

It was our love, That left it all behind. Is there something, This evening that you could add, To make the Lord love you more? We always maybe have that sense of, I'm trying to please God, And it's right and good to have that, But is there anything you could do, That could make the Lord love you more?

No, because he's loved us, With everything. He gave himself for us, He emptied himself, He humbled himself, He became obedient, To the point of death, Even death on the cross. He bore our sin, He paid our debt, He set us free, There's nothing we could offer him, To make him love us more. He paid the price, He paid the ransom, Being poor, That we might be rich, Through him.

So it is that love, That left everything behind, That we might be rich, And know that love, In all its fullness. So that's the first thing, That we see.

[11:25] The second thing we see, Is this love, That reached out. For this we turn to Romans, Chapter 5, And verse 8, And again you see, Demonstrating the love of God, Here tied into, The prayer that Paul has, In Ephesians 3, Romans 5, Verse 8 says, But God demonstrates, His own love for us, In this, While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. It was the love, That reached out. It wasn't that we came to him, And loved him, But that he loved us, And reached out for us.

As somebody put it, The Lord Jesus did not come into the world, To meet with his friends, He came to die, For his enemies. These words hit us powerfully, Maybe when we think, I'm no enemy of the Lord, That cannot be me.

And yet Romans 5, Verse 8, Makes it clear to us, That we were, We were all at one time, At enmity with God. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We are entrusting our life to him, We are looking to him for life, But it's the wonder, Of the love that reached out to us.

[13:03] As Martin was praying in his prayer, How he came to know, The wonder of this love, How the Lord reached out, And how it's true, For every one of us.

How it's true, How we were lost, In this world, Until by his grace, He reached out, He took hold of us, While we were still sinners, He died for us.

And you think of that love, We can show love to others, We can show love, And it's easy to show love, To some more than others, But we think of friends, And families who we love, But enemies is much more difficult, It's sometimes a step too far for us, But not for Christ, Because while we were in enmity with him, While we were still sinners, Before him, Christ died for us.

That is how wide, How long, How high, And how deep, The love of Christ is for sinners. While we were still sinners, While we were still enemies, He died for us.

And when you read through the Gospels, And when you read through Paul's letters, And you read through the book of Acts, You see how often Jesus was rejected, How often Jesus was shunned.

[14:28] He came to die for people, Who made idols, And false images in his place. He came to die for people, Who had turned away from the truth of his word, And turned to a lie.

There was this chasm between God and people. We were separated from him. And the only way for this to be rectified, Was for the divide to be bridged.

And only Christ could do it. Only he could come and bridge that gap. The love of Christ, Is what reconciles us through faith to God.

Because he came to give his life on the cross. And so when we know that we are sinners, When we know that we fall short of his glory so often, We can see this great love that reached out.

We can remind ourselves that he took hold of us. And that as Paul is praying here, That we would comprehend with all the saints. That we would lay hold of this love more and more, And again and again, Daily in our lives, To be in that relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[15:51] There's that wonderful phrase in Christianity explored, I'm sure you've heard it before, Where it says, We are more sinful than we ever realized, But more loved than we ever dreamed.

That's what the Lord reaching out to us shows us. We are more sinful than we ever realized. That's what we see when the Lord works.

When he brings us before him, And he shows us our sin, We are more sinful than we ever realized. But then we look beyond that, And we see we are more loved than we ever dreamed.

Because while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. John Stott, reflecting on these verses in Ephesians chapter 3, On just the enormity of the love of God, He says this, The love of Christ is broad enough to encompass all mankind, Long enough to last for eternity, Deep enough to reach the most degraded sinner, And high enough to exalt him to heaven.

There's no bounds to the love of God. It reaches out in every direction. That is the love we see when we see Christ has come down for his people.

[17:10] He has reached out for his people. The third thing that we see here is the love that gives life. The wonder of this love is the love that came down and gives us life.

And for this we look at John chapter 10. John chapter 10, In verse 10 and 11.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But I have come that they may have life, And have it to the full.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. He came that we might have life to the full.

The thief comes to kill and to steal and destroy. There was footage recorded outside somebody's house.

[18:09] They had their car parked in the driveway. The car was valued at £90,000. And two thieves appeared at this house. And within about 10 seconds, They'd got into this car, Started it and drove away.

It was almost crazy just how quickly it happened. 10 seconds to break into a car that should never be broken into.

And yet they had the equipment to do it. And that's what sin does. When we think we're protected, When we think we've got everything together, It can come in just so quickly.

And rob us of everything. That's what the thief does. But Jesus has come that we might have life. And he came to lay down his life for his sheep.

That we might have life in him. And so the greatness of this love is expressed. That he came to give his life that we might have life in him.

[19:14] And when we look at our lives, And we look at God, We see just how far away we are from him. The holiness of God is something that we just cannot come before at times.

How can we come before a holy God? He is righteous. And any righteousness that we have is like filthy rags, As the word of God says.

How could we possibly come? Well, it's only through the righteousness of Christ, Which we receive by faith. And that's what we see when we look at these kinds of verses, Like John 10.

The thief comes to kill and destroy. But I am come that they might have life. He is the one who gives us this life. How can we come before him through faith in the Lord Jesus?

Just like Psalm 130 verse 7. O Israel, hope in the Lord. For with the Lord there is steadfast love, And with him is plentiful redemption.

[20:17] And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. It is only through Christ that we can come before God.

This love that came down in Christ is so we might be restored in our relationship with him. And what love God has shown to us.

The love that came down was because God sent his son into this world. His only son. As John 3.16 says, That is the love that has been shown to us.

The love that has come down. And that is the love that Paul prayed that we would grasp in this passage in Ephesians chapter 3. The wonder of it.

The height, the length, the breadth, the depth. And it is not just thinking about the Lord Jesus coming into the world. His incarnation, his birth. It is not just looking at the cradle as they would say, but to the cross.

[21:29] It is life complete. It is life complete. Because it is a love unlike any other. Christ's love is beyond understanding in many ways unless we know his grace.

And that is why Paul here is praying. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. That you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to lay hold with all the saints.

What is the breadth and length and height and depth. And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled with the fullness of God.

Love has come down. And may we remember that love. And may our prayer be that we will be filled with more and more a sense of wonder of this love.

The love that reached out. The love that we see in Jesus Christ. The love that surpasses all knowledge.

[22 : 35] That will be our prayer for ourselves and for all around us. To see the wonder, the breadth and length and height and depth of our love like no other.

Well let us pray. Lord our gracious God. We thank you that your word continually opens our eyes to see more and more of the wonder of your love towards us.

The love that came down. The love that was dwelt among us. The love that we see in the birth, in the life, in the death and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And may we comprehend. May we lay hold of it all the more. In these days and in all the days ahead. May you help us, as Paul prayed, to grasp all of these things.

To take hold of them. The love that surpasses knowledge. That we might be filled with the fullness of God. So hear our prayers and go before us now.

[23 : 40] Pardoning our sin. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.