

1 Samuel Chapter 1 v 9 - Chapter 2 v 2

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[0 : 00] It is that time, you know. I'm not jumping the gun or anything. It is quarter two, time that we started. Well, welcome everybody. Good to see you. And we've got a very special, well, not really a guest, but a visitor here who's going to share a little bit later on and someone that many of us know very well.

And so we welcome you. I don't think we've got any other folk particularly who are visiting us this morning, just our regular crew. Welcome. We're here again because of the Lord our God, because of his goodness to us, and because, of course, he gave his one and only Son. And our thoughts are very much centered upon the coming of Christ.

And here's again the message of the angels on that very first Christmas morning. The angel said to them, to the shepherds, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people.

Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He's the Messiah, the Lord. And then a great company of the angels, the heavenly host, appeared, praising God.

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests. The first hymn is that Christmas hymn, Hark the glad sound.

[1 : 24] Listen, the glad sound, the good news, Christ has come. The glad sound, the good news of the coming of the Savior.

Let's come with gladness and joy to our God in prayer together as we bring to him our thanks. O Lord, our God, you are the one who gave your only begotten Son for us.

You are the God who is generous and withholds no good thing. You are the God who is the provider of all our needs. You are the God who is the creator of all that we see.

There is none like you. And Lord, we thank you that this morning as we come, we can say that you are our God and our Father. What an incredible privilege that is that we can be known as the children of God.

What a blessing that is. What joy that brings to our hearts when we think of this, that we are loved by the everlasting and eternal God. And though some may see you as high and aloof and distant and unfeeling and strange, yet, Lord, we know the warmth of your love because you've poured your love into our hearts by your Holy Spirit.

[2 : 49] We know, O Lord, that we are loved of God, that we are precious in your sight. You're not distant, but you're near. For you're the one who's promised, never will I leave you nor forsake you.

You're the God who is with us day by day. And Lord, we thank you that we know this is the case because you have given to us the assurance and the promise of your word, but you've also given to us your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you that he is the one that you gave, who was heaven's everlasting Son, who was for eternity God with you and the Holy Spirit in that mystery, that marvel, which is the Trinity.

But we thank you that you gave him, and he came willingly and gladly, Lord, to save and to rescue and to bring us into your family, to bring us from the outside in, to bring us from far away to be close and near, to be intimate with you.

Thank you that we know that intimacy through Christ, through his wonderful grace, through his life lived on our behalf, through his death died in our place, our substitute.

[3 : 55] We thank you that's because Jesus died, and because he rose again, we know that we have forgiveness of sins. And we come to you again this morning, Lord, and we confess that we are sinful people.

Confess, oh Lord, that in our hearts and our lives we have not loved you as we should have done. We've not obeyed you as we should have done. We've not done those acts of love to others that we should have done. Lord, we've fallen so far short, and yet we thank you that you do not look down on us and wag your finger.

But rather again, in your mercy and grace, you cleanse and forgive us from our sins. You accept us. And oh Lord, you give to us hope and help that we might live differently in this world day by day.

We praise you and thank you, oh Lord, that we can be here this morning. Thank you for the health you've given us and strength you've given us to be here. We pray that we might worship you and adore you and delight in you and that we might know you speaking to us and meeting with us.

For Lord, we're here for one purpose and one reason, not to see our friends, not for a cup of coffee afterwards, not to sing jolly songs. We're here, oh Lord, to meet with and to fellowship with you, the living God.

[5 : 09] So Lord, make us ready and prepared to hear and to meet with you this morning. For we ask it in the name of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Briefly about what we've heard of from Mandy.

Wonderful, wonderful work of God. Father in heaven, we're humbled and amazed and astonished every time we listen to the things that you are doing around the world in your church and for people like ourselves who were lost and blind and deaf to your truth and to your grace.

And we just do again give you great thanks for the way that you so led and guided Alan and Mandy those years ago and provided for them and helped them and kept them.

And we so thank you for the way that you have been at work in Sophonica and in those other villages around and about to build your church, to rescue and to save men and women who were locked and bound in all sorts of very evil and wicked religion.

And we do pray that you would indeed bless your church there. Thank you now that the scriptures are nearly complete and we pray that very soon there may be a whole Bible being able to be shared and read for you.

[6 : 25] We know that your word gives life and freedom. And we thank you for those who have worked so hard. We pray for Vern and Denny. You would particularly help and strengthen and bless them as in their work and to continue to help Alan and Mandy in their connections.

Thank you for keeping Mandy and Faye, her daughter, safe while they were away and for the great blessing that time was in Ivory Coast. We pray for these four men that you would save them and soften their hearts and open them to your truth.

We pray for the country which is suffering and especially, Lord, as the elections come up next year, we ask that they may be peaceful, that there may not be another civil war or riots or killing or murder, but there may be real peace in that nation, in that troubled part of Africa.

And we do pray again, oh Lord, that you would continue to heal and to strengthen Mandy, Lord, with her back and with her brain and continue to use her and Alan too in their service of you.

We thank you for Andrew. We pray you bless him and Faye too, their children, and Paige, their granddaughter. We pray that you would be to them all that they need. And Lord, we just do give you thanks again for our own nation and for our own elections that have taken place peacefully.

[7 : 42] We haven't had riots and fighting in the streets, and we do commit to you our own leaders, our prime minister and the new government that will be formed. We pray, oh Lord, that you would have mercy upon us as a nation and that, Lord, you would bless our leaders, especially that they may know you and seek you and do your will and follow your ways.

We pray for ourselves too, Lord, as we come to this Christmas time, as we have opportunity to sit down on the bus or to sit next to somebody in the surgery or wherever it may be and to talk to them about Christ and his coming.

We pray that this Christmas many may hear the wonderful glad tidings of good news of the one who gives light to the eyeballs of the blind. And we ask you to continue with us and help us in our time together now.

In Jesus' name, amen. Let's sing once more together a hymn that's going to come up on the screen behind us very much in keeping with what we've been.

God of grace, amazing wonder. Great.

[8 : 52] Let's turn together in our Bibles and we're going to read from 1 Samuel and chapter 1. That's page 271.

Page 271, 1 Samuel. Can I just check? Is the carol service not at 4 o'clock? And they have tea afterwards? Yeah. Yeah, okay.

Sorry about that, Peter. That's all right, Richard. I just wanted to check because I thought, well, people might come, not come at 4, thinking, oh, it's just tea. I'll come at 6 for the service. Yeah, okay.

Lovely. Thank you. So 4 o'clock is the actual service. Then there's food afterwards. Okay. That's just to check there. So page 271, 1 Samuel. We're going to pick up the story from verse 9 just to say this is concerning this woman, Hannah.

She's married to Elkanah, but she was infertile. She wasn't able to have children. He marries another woman who has lots of children, but still poor Hannah can't.

[9 : 52] So verse 9, once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, that's where the tabernacle was, where the worship of God was centered, Hannah stood up.

Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish, Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly.

And she made a vow saying, Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me and not forget your servant, but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life and no razor will ever be used on his head.

As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk. He said to her, how long are you going to stay drunk?

Put away your wine. Not so, my Lord, Hannah replied. I'm a woman who's deeply troubled. I've not been drinking wine or beer. I was pouring out my soul to the Lord.

[10 : 56] Do not take your servant for a wicked woman. I've been praying here out of my great anguish and grief. Eli answered, go in peace. May the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.

She said, may your servant find favor in your eyes. Then she went away and ate something and her face was no longer downcast. Early the next morning, they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah.

Elkanah made love to his wife, Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. So in the course of time, Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, because I asked the Lord for him.

When her husband Elkanah went up with his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, after the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord and he will live there always.

Do what seems best to you, her husband Elkanah told her. Stay here until you've weaned him. Only may the Lord make good his word. So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

[12 : 06] After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, Nephah flower and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh.

When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli and she said to him, Pardon me, my Lord. Surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord.

I prayed for this child and the Lord has granted me what I asked for of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life, he shall have given over to the Lord and he worshipped the Lord there.

Then Hannah prayed and said, My heart rejoices in the Lord. In the Lord, my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.

There is no one holy like the Lord. There is no one besides you. There is no rock like our God. And we'll stop there. Let's go back to 1 Samuel, page 271, where we just read a few moments ago.

[13 : 12] So it's Christmas time. I think that's not escaped anybody's notice. But if I was to ask you, what one word sums up the meaning of Christmas?

I wonder what you would think or say about it. Without being cynical, of course, people would be cynical and say, Christmas is all about debt or Christmas is all about arguments with the family or whatever it may be.

Without being cynical or trivial, what would many people say is the one word best describes the essence, we might say, of Christmas? I think the word giving, giving is a very good word to sum up the essence, the center of what Christmas is about.

And I think that would be true of people who are not Christians. People who would say, well, I'm not particularly religious. They might say, well, Christmas is. It's best enjoyed when you're giving. You're giving gifts to your family or to your friends, when you're giving food or giving your time to one another.

Giving, it's a good way to describe how we can enjoy the best of Christmas. And of course, for those of us who are Christians, those of us who are religious in that sense, we would say that Christmas is celebrated as a time of giving.

[14 : 28] One of Graham Kendrick's songs from his Christmas collection is at this time of giving, we come to you with good news of great joy.

Time of giving. We give special thought as believers to God giving his one and only son to us. Giving. The incarnation, that's the son of God taking on our human nature, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the sending of the son of God into the world is the greatest act of giving the world has ever experienced or will ever experience.

The giving of God's son. Now, over the past two or three Sunday mornings, we've been thinking about how Jesus' birth was preempted, was looked forward to through the miraculous births of other children in the Old Testament.

And so a fortnight ago, we together, when I was here, looked at the birth of Isaac, the son of Abraham, and Sarah. We saw that was in God's perfect timing.

God's timing, he sent his son, the Lord Jesus, just as it was in the timing of God that Abraham and Sarah had a child. Then last Sunday morning, Joel preached on the birth of Samson.

[15 : 48] I don't know what he said, but I'm sure it was very good. And about how his life reflected and, in one sense, didn't reflect the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Samson, the last of the judges. This morning, I want to turn our attention to the man who came next in God's wonderful order of leading his people, and that was Samuel.

And that's why we read something of the leading up to his birth and immediately following his birth. Samuel was a very important figure in the Old Testament. He was the link between the judges and between the kings of Israel.

He was that link person. He was God's chosen servant for a special time in the history of Israel. And I believe that his birth, like the other miraculous births, points to that one true miraculous birth when the Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary, when God himself took upon human nature.

Samuel, as a servant of the Lord, points to the great servant, the one servant, the true servant of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. And I want us just to pick up on one thing, one aspect of Samuel's life that I think points us particularly to the birth of Christ.

[17 : 07] And it's not something that Samuel does, but it's rather something that his mother Hannah does very clearly in this passage. And you can see it there if you turn to 1 Samuel 1, verse 28.

And she's talking to Eli, the priest at the tabernacle at God's house in one sense in Shiloh. And she says, Now I give him to the Lord.

For his whole life he shall be given over to the Lord. She gave Samuel. She gave Samuel, we might say gave him to the Lord. Now we got a sense of just how desperately Hannah wanted a child in that prayer that we read and how she talks to Eli earlier in chapter 1.

We're told that she poured out her heart. We're told that she wept bitterly. We're told that she prayed earnestly for this child. And the truth is that she had been infertile for many, many years.

As I hinted at before the reading, her husband Elkanah loved her. That was his first wife was Hannah. But when she couldn't have children, it seems, he married another woman, Peninnah, who was a rather nasty piece of work.

[18 : 20] And she was able to procreate like rabbits. She was just having to have children after children of children. But poor Hannah couldn't have any children. And so for years, she'd been bitterly upset and saddened.

And so she'd prayed and prayed. And now after all this time, after all this time of waiting, all this time of agonizing over having a child, after all this time of praying and seeking God, now she gets a child, she gives him away.

She gives him to the Lord. Now we've all heard of people who've had to have their children taken from them in very sad circumstances.

Perhaps they have had to give away their children. This may have been much more the case in the past. People having to give their children away because they were so poor they couldn't keep them and look after them or feed them or troubling circumstances that meant they had to relinquish their children.

We know of situations, sadly, where children are taken from their mothers or from their parents by their social services because one reason or another. We know of that. But here's not a woman who's had her child taken away from her, but she's given her child.

[19 : 28] And she wasn't impoverished. It wasn't that she was too poor to look after him. She seemed to be from a well-off family as she had a relatively stable family situation and marriage with Elkanah.

She could have given this son of Samuel a good upbringing and education in the things of God. But here she is. She gives away her son. No one takes him from her.

She's not forced to act in this way. The question must be why. Why did she give her son to the Lord? Why did she give this beloved son, this precious son, this longed-for son away?

Well, one reason, certainly, is because she promised that she would do so. Remember her prayer back in chapter 1 and verse 11. She made this vow, this promise to God.

Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life and no razor will ever be used on his head.

[20 : 30] That wasn't a, because that long hair was the fashion. If you've been studying judges with us, you'll know that when somebody did not cut their hair, it was a sign they were dedicated to God.

They were a Nazarite. Samson was one and his hair caused him all sorts of trouble. But that's what it meant. So she'd made this promise. She'd made this vow. She'd made a vow.

Lord, if you answer my prayer, I will do this for you. I will give my son to you to the entirety of his life. People make similar sort of prayers, don't they, or vows. God, if you help me out this fix, then I'll go to church.

If you help me solve this problem, then I'll put my faith and trust in you. If you answer this prayer at this situation, then I'll do that. But of course, unlike Hannah, most people who say that sort of thing don't mean it.

They may mean it at the time, but they never do it. When things are better, when life is easier, when things are sorted out, then they forget about the promise they ever made to God.

[21 : 32] Hannah didn't do that. She didn't renege on her promise to God. She didn't go back on her promise. There's a sort of an inkling, I think, in verse 23 that her husband Elkanah thought that she might do that on the very first time, as it were, back to Shiloh.

She says, I'm not going to go up this time. I'm going to wean him. Well, those of you parents, you know what weaning is. Those of you children, you won't remember. But weaning is basically going from milk to solids.

She's going to say, until he's on solid food, I'm not going to give him, because obviously he needs to be given milk. So, but he seems to think, well, do what seems best to you, husband Elkanah, stay here until you've weaned him.

Only may the Lord make good his word. There's a set, that phrase is not all that easy to translate, but it could be, something like this, only make sure that you're good to your word, to the Lord.

I think he feels, maybe she, you know, once she got the child in her arms, when she's attached to him, she may go back. But no, she didn't. She made this vow, she made this promise, she'd taken this oath.

[22 : 43] I will give, if God gives me a son, I will give him back. Oh, so we could sort of think, well, she sort of painted herself into a corner, hasn't she? She's made a promise that she can't go back on.

She sort of got herself in a tight spot. She, you know, she said this promise to God, but now, well, she's got to come up with it. She can't, she can't back out of it. No, that's not the case at all.

That's not the case at all. The promise she made, and the giving of her son was given with great joy, not with regret, if I can put it that way.

Because immediately, as we go into chapter two, as soon as she's given Samuel over to Eli to look after, to raise in the temple, to raise as a servant of the Lord, she says, my heart rejoices in the Lord.

Now, I don't think there's any sense that we can say that she was glad to be rid of him, without being too flippant. There aren't many parents here, or I speak for myself, many of us, who at one time or another haven't thought how nice it might be just to hand over our child for at least for a little while, particularly when they're about two, and difficult, as they can be at that sort of time.

[24 : 00] I think, you know, all of us at some time thought, well, I'd quite gladly hand them over at least for a bit to get them out, give me a little bit of peace. But there's no sense of that. She's not glad to be rid of Samuel. It's not that he was going through the terrible twos and having tantrums all the time, at least we're not told that he was.

No, she's glad because she's able to give her son and there's a sense of joy in giving her child to the Lord. She's not bitter. She's not filled with remorse.

Now, saying that, I don't think for any moment that it was easy for her to do this. There's a difference between joy and happiness, if I can put it that way.

It's a real joy, but it must have been hard. It must have been hard for her to hand over this young boy who would only be maybe a matter of months, maybe a year old at most. She wouldn't have been human if she didn't feel that sense of loss.

This was a real sacrifice for her. This was a real costly gift. And no one would have blamed her. Perhaps if she had changed her mind and gone back on her promise.

[25 : 08] But she didn't. She went joyfully and gladly. She was thankful to God that he'd given her this dear boy and she was glad and joyful in that sense to give him back to the Lord, to entrust him in the Lord's hands.

Surely, dear friends, the place of joy and peace for us as parents and grandparents is when we can, at least in prayer, give our children to the Lord. It's the only place we can leave them, the only place we can put them.

We want to closet them. We want to look after them. We want to protect them. We want to do everything for them, but dear friends, in the end, ultimately we have to leave them with the Lord. We have to give our children to the Lord. And there is a peace in that.

And there is a contentment in that. And so what am I getting at here? What I'm getting at is this. In the giving of her son, Samuel, to the Lord, Hannah not only shows that she's a woman of great faith and she truly is, but also shows that she's a true follower of the Lord because her action points us to the very action of God in the giving of his son.

What's the most famous verse in the Bible? What's the verse that sums up the whole of the Bible message? Oh, well done. John 3.16.

[26 : 26] For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son or his only begotten son. Christmas, what we're doing, we're remembering that God gave his one and only son, the Lord Jesus Christ as we know him.

And although there's much to admire, I hope, in what we see of Hannah and her giving and her faith and her trust in the Lord, yet I trust that as we turn from her to the one who gave his son, we shall see something much more admirable in the sacrifice and the costliness of that gift too.

See, God gave, as that verse tells us in John 3.16, his only begotten son, or in the more modern translation we have now, his one and only son.

Yes, Hannah gave her one child, her one son. She had no other son at the time, but she did go on to have other children. God blessed her, and in fact, she had five more children, three of whom were sons.

But God had only one son, and he's described in John 3.16 as his only begotten son. Now, we need to get past this thought somehow, that when God gave his son into the world, it was an easy thing for him to do.

[27 : 48] If we try to imagine, and for some of us it's not hard to do that, what it means to give away our son, then we have just a slight sense of what it meant for God to give away his son.

The real sacrifice, the real pain, the real difficulty, you know, even though, yes, we know that God knew that he would get his son back, if I can put it that way, we knew that he knows, it doesn't remove the pain, it doesn't remove the heartache.

You see, here was the son of God, who along with the Father and the Spirit had spent all eternity in the closest and most intimate and most lovely fellowship, which is the Trinity, the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, one God, three persons, and together they had enjoyed and delighted in one another in the most beautiful of ways that can never be reproduced even in the very best of friendships, marriages, or families, and yet God gave his son.

it was not easy, it was costly. But let's remember this as well, when Hannah gave her son, she gave her son over to the Lord to live for the Lord.

But when God gave his son, he gave his son over to death. Now that's strongly implied, isn't it, in John 3, 16, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that believes in him.

[29 : 18] And there's a sense clearly there that he's giving his son over to death. But that's something that comes out much more strongly in other parts of the scriptures, particularly in Romans. Romans 8, he did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all.

Did not spare him. Did not spare him from death. Did not spare him from suffering. Did not spare him from bearing the sin. And then again in Romans 4, 25, he was given over for our sins.

Yes, Hannah gave her son into the safe keeping of the Lord and that's something that we have to do by faith as parents and grandparents as well. But God gave his son into the hands of wicked men into a sinful world.

A world which would abuse him and attack him and reject him and hate him. He gave his son into a world where he knew that they would ultimately take him and crucify him and put him to death.

And he knew that. Isaiah in chapter 53 tells us about this one, this son of God who was to come, this giving, this child.

[30 : 25] Isaiah 53 looks forward to this. He says, he grew up before him, grew up before God like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.

Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain, like one from whom people hide their faces.

He was despised and we held him in low esteem. That's, God knew and gave his son. Would you give your child into the hands of wicked people, evil people that would abuse and attack and kill and murder and maim and suffer?

Knowingly? Hannah gave her son, Samuel, to the Lord in faith knowing that the Lord would take care of him and provide for him and love him and bless him and he did but God knew.

God kept his promise, you see, to give his son. This is Isaiah, 600 years before Jesus' birth and the promises of God all the way through the Old Testament point to the coming of this saviour, this king, this redeemer, this one who ultimately is the very son of God.

[31 : 42] God gave, kept his promise. Not because he had to but because he wanted to and yet surely again we can't miss out on the pain of that of giving his son over to death must have been something unbearable.

We get something of a glimpse of that, don't we, when the Lord Jesus Christ is on the cross and he's crying out in prayer to his father, the father who loved him from eternity, the father who had given him into the world and he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why have you given up on me? Are those words just words? Of course they're not, the very pouring out of the heart, the very tearing of the heart. Could the father in heaven who heard those words be indifferent to them and unmoved by them?

Surely not. I'm not trying to be sentimental, dear friends, I'm not trying to bring us into some sort of mushiness, but we've got to grasp, again, that just the cost, just the pain, just the real sacrifice of God the father in giving his son.

Again, as I said, the father wasn't forced to give his son, didn't have to. He could have left us in our sin. He could have left us in the mire and the mud and the filthiness of our evil doing.

[32 : 54] He could have left us to the day of judgment to face what we deserve, eternal separation from God. He could have just stood by and done nothing and nobody would have blamed him for that. Nobody would have blamed him for keeping back his son and not giving him, but he did.

And he did so joyfully. Again, surely that's something of the sense that we get when we hear the angels in heaven announcing the birth of the Son of God.

I bring you news of great joy. Isn't it God's joy that's being shared as well? Yes, joy for the people, but God's joy? And then the Lord Jesus Christ himself, he did not come unwillingly.

He wasn't forced out of heaven by his Father. He wasn't booted out. He came knowing what he would face. He came knowing what was in store for him. And what does it say in Hebrews 12? For the joy that was set before him.

He endured the cross, scorned the shame. Gladly, God gave his son.

[34 : 01] That the pain was great. When Hannah gave her son, Samuel, to the Lord, she didn't know what the Lord had planned for him.

She didn't know that he'd become a great blessing to God's people. She didn't know that God would use him to be a prophet and a leader and a savior, really, to the people of that nation.

And that's what he did. In fact, Samuel was a most faithful servant of the Lord. He was blessed and used by God to turn the Israelites back to himself, to rescue them from the Philistines and from their enemies, bring about a tremendous time of great blessing to that nation.

It's God's instrument. Listen again to that verse in John 3.16, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For the salvation of the world God gave his son. See, John 3.16 goes into 3.17 and it says this, He came into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world.

[35 : 18] Samuel came for a short time to be a blessing to a small group of people, the Israelite nation, but Christ came to serve the needs of the whole world for all eternity and all of time.

Samuel came and brought peace and prosperity to the people from war and trouble for a time but Christ came to bring peace with God and eternal security and life everlasting.

God gave his one and only son so that everyone who receives him can themselves become a child of God. In John's gospel in chapter 1 and verse 12 where we told about how the people rejected him and would not receive him when he came to them we're told this, but those who did receive him he gave the right to become children of God.

Children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will but born of God. The son of God was given by the father so that through him there may be many sons of God.

Not like Christ, of course he was the one unique the only begotten but that we might become the children of God. He gave that which he loved the most and sacrificed and cost him the greatest so that you and I dear friends could experience and know the love of God as our father.

[36 : 50] when you give a gift to somebody the gift says more about the giver than the one who receives it doesn't it? When you give a gift to someone it tells you what the person is like, what they feel, what they think about the person they're giving the gift to.

And what does the giving of the God of, what does the giving of God's son to us say to us? What does it shout to us? What does it declare to us? What does it say to the whole world?

The giving of God's son in this way shouts God is love. For God so loved the world. The men and women of the world. The men and women who took his son and put him upon a cross and killed him.

And you and I would have done exactly the same as we've been there. So don't think you wouldn't have done. Because we've rejected him since then.

We've hated him since then. We've turned away from him since then. We've gone our own way since then. And for such a world and such people like you and me, God gave his son to declare to us the absolute unquestionable certainty that God is love.

[38 : 13] love. It's a time of giving. But dear friends, it must be a time of receiving. God's greatest gift.

Let's pray together. there are times, oh Lord, in our lives when we doubt that you love us.

Perhaps even today. Times in our lives, oh Lord, when we feel as if you have taken things from us or withheld things from us or done things in our lives which shouldn't have ever been done.

And in our thinking and our foolishness, we have ascribed these acts of yours to acts of hate or unkindness or lovelessness.

But oh Lord, there is one absolute certainty, one absolute certainty that we know and we declare and we hold to and we rejoice in. It's the certainty that you gave your son out of love and because of love and for the sake of love of us.

[39 : 32] And if you gave your son and you did not hold him back but you did not spare him but gave him up for us, how will you not also give us all good things?

How can we ever doubt? How can we ever wobble in our trust? Or keep us ever looking to your gift? Keep us ever reminded full of your gift that you gave Jesus Christ, your only begotten son, that we might ever dwell in, ever rejoice in, ever live in the love of God, every day, every moment.

For we thank you, Lord. We thank you, Lord, that you loved us and that you love us still and that love is everlasting.

Amen. Amen.