

Luke Chapter 3 v 21 & 22

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Date: 25 February 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Welcome. Welcome to all of you. I don't think we've got any special visitors from out of town, as it were. Just our usual crew and a few extras. So lovely to see you.

And we were away, as you know, last week. So thank you for those who looked after things while we were away. I wonder how you've come to church this morning. I wonder what you think, what you feel.

Well, here's what the Lord God says to us, as he said to his people of old. Jeremiah chapter 31. The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying, I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

What an amazing statement that God declares. I have loved you with an everlasting love. In other words, a love that in one sense has no beginning, has no end. A love which is mighty, because it's a love that draws us to himself.

And of course, for us, that love appeared in the Lord Jesus Christ when he came into the world. The love of God manifest for us to see, to experience, to know, now and always.

[1 : 1 2] Now, our first hymn is going to come up on the screen behind me. Loved before the dawn of time. Speaking of that everlasting love. Let's stand as we sing. Let's continue in our worship as we pray together.

Let us pray. Lord, our God, when we consider the words of that song, when we consider the words that we've read from your word, the scriptures, that we are loved with an everlasting love, we really have to stop and pause and take it all in.

That you should love us itself is an amazing thing. When we consider and remind ourselves that we are indeed stained with sin, that we are a people who in our lives, even just this day and this week, have acted and spoken and thought things which are really wrong, really offensive to you, really an act of rebellion against you.

That you should still love us in spite of what we've done, in spite of who we are. That's incredible in itself. That you should have even a thought, a concern for us. But love us.

Actually love us. But Lord, that you should love us with an everlasting love. A love, yes, that was from before the dawn of time. A love which is timeless.

[2 : 4 8] Lord, that's hard for us to take in. It's hard for us to get our puny minds around. Lord, love which has always been. Because you have always been, and you have always been love.

God is love. But that you should have loved us with a timeless love. And that means that that love you have for us, that love which stretches from before the world was made, stretches through time, that love which has become real and become flesh in the person of your Son, Jesus Christ.

that love which took him to the cross and suffered and died in our place, taking the punishment we deserve, dying the death that was ours.

That love which brought him to life again, conquering sin and death. That love which meant that, Lord, there was that day for each and every one of us who is a child of God when you spoke into our hearts, whereby your Spirit you made us alive.

We were ignorant and foolish and lost and blind. We were wandering around in life where we did not know you. And you came to us. You took the initiative.

[4 : 01] You brought us into, in love, you brought us into the company of Christians, or you brought us into a place where we heard about Jesus and his love for us. And you spoke to our hearts and you opened our blind eyes and you took away the deafness from our ears and you made us to be your children and brought us into the embrace and the experience and the knowledge of your love.

And ever since that day, you've never left us nor forsaken us, nor can you, because you've promised that you won't. And that love, oh Lord, which has followed us all through our lives, that love, which is with us not just on a Sunday but on a Monday and a Tuesday and a Wednesday and through the week, even on a Friday.

That love, oh Lord, for us is an active, powerful love still, still working, still managing, still overseeing, Lord, the events of our lives, even those painful and difficult ones, are not proof or evidence that you've stopped loving us.

Rather, you love us in the midst of them. And we thank you, oh Lord, that right up into the day and the moment we breathe that final breath in this world, your love for us will be ever near.

And will death separate us from that love? Will death take away love? Will we cease to experience? No, Lord, because for every one of your children, everyone who is alive by your Spirit, everyone who knows you, Lord, that moment of death will be the moment when we experience your love as we have longed to experience it.

[5 : 39] For we'll be free from the shackles and the bounds of this life. We'll be free from the sin and the weakness and the foolishness. We'll be free from all those things that make your love hard for us to see or comprehend or to enjoy.

Lord, we shall enter into the fullness of your love and for eternity bask in the sunshine and the warmth and the joy of your love. Oh, Lord, how we thank you for that everlasting love and perhaps this morning we don't feel loved, far from it.

Perhaps we feel our sin more than ever. Perhaps we feel further from you than we ever have for some time. Lord, we pray, draw near to us and reveal to us your great love.

Make us to know again what it is to be a child of God and again, for those of us who've never experienced your love and it seems so strange to hear someone speak of it in this way.

Oh, Lord, cause us to hunger and thirst and to desire to pant after that love. But, Lord, you know how much you want to give it.

[6 : 47] Oh, Lord, make us ready to receive it, we pray. We ask these things as we give you our thanks, our praise in and through Jesus, your Son. Amen.

Amen. Well, let's turn together in our Bibles and turn back to Luke and chapter 3.

We've been looking at the Gospel of Luke since before Christmas and we've been in chapter 3 for a few weeks and then I was away last Sunday and we're back again.

But just to remind us of where we are, we're going to read chapter 3 beginning at verse 1 and read it through to verse 22. Okay, so beginning of Luke chapter 3 that's page 1029.

Page 1029. Very grateful to Alan and Pam for doing the monthly notice sheet. Appreciate that very much.

[7 : 47] Thank you. So let's read God's Word. In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod Tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip Tetrarch of Aeturia and Traconitis and Licinius Tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the Word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

He went into all the country around the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low, the crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth, and all the people shall see God's salvation.

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father, for I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

The axe has been laid to the root of the trees and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. What should we do then?

[9 : 23] the crowd asked. John answered, anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none and anyone who has food should do the same. Even tax collectors came to be baptized.

Teacher, they asked, what should we do? Don't collect any more than you are required to, he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, and what should we do? He replied, don't extort money, don't accuse people falsely, be content with your pay.

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

And with the many other words, John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. But when John rebuked Herod the Tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other things he had done, Herod added this to them all, he locked John up in prison.

[10 : 44] When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove and a voice came from heaven, you are my son whom I love, with you I'm well pleased.

We're going to concentrate on those last two verses. This morning in a few moments. If you'd like to have Luke and chapter 3 open in your Bible, particularly as I said, those two verses, 21 and 22.

Just read them again. When all the people were being baptized, that's by John of course, John the Baptist, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened.

The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. A voice came from heaven, you are my son whom I love, with you I am well pleased.

One of my heroes of the church is a man called Billy Bray. Billy Bray was a 19th century tin miner in Cornwall. And he'd been a terrible drunkard and spent all his wages on the drink and always in fights and always up to trouble.

[12 : 03] And then wonderfully, because there was a terrible tragedy in the mine and some people were killed near to him, it really brought him to shake him in his boots as it were to see that he needed Christ and he was converted.

And he was a changed man but he was still a brash, loud man. He used to walk around and he said, when I lift up my, put down my left foot it says, hallelujah. When I put down my right foot it says, amen.

And so I go, hallelujah, amen, all the way down the street. And he would shout glory everywhere. And people of course, you've got a bit upset with him and they'd say, shut up Billy, stop shouting about God. He said, you can't stop me shouting.

He said, if you stuck me in a barrel I'd still shout glory out of the bunghole, he said. And things like that. Anyway, one day he was out visiting, he'd taken somebody with him and they were going around sharing the gospel with people and they came to quite an auspicious house, an important gentleman's house.

And of course, people like Billy and they should always go to the back entrance, the servant's entrance, you know. And that's what the friend suggested. Billy was clearly going for the front door and he said, no, we should go to the back door surely, Billy.

[13 : 08] And Billy said, no, I'm the son of a king. I'm going to go in through the front door. You see, Billy was directed in the way he lived because of who he was.

How he saw himself affected everything he did, that's true of all of us. How we view ourselves, how we understand ourselves directly impacts our relationship with others, our relationship in work, at home, in church, in school, wherever it may be.

And so the big question this morning is, who are you? Who are you? Now as we come here to Luke 3 and we come to verse 21, Jesus appears on the scene for the first time in 18 years.

And he is totally aware of who he is. In fact, Jesus was totally aware of who he was, if you remember, right back when he was 12 years old, when he was in the temple and his parents were searching for him and they came looking for him and he said, why are you looking for me?

Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house? He knew he was the Son of God with assurance. And everything that he did and everything in his life flowed from that confidence, that assurance that he knew who he was, the Son of God.

[14 : 31] And in these two verses that we have, and you may think, why are we only looking at two verses? Because there's so much here. What we see here is not Jesus being told he's the Son of God to assure him for something he wasn't sure about.

Certainly not him becoming the Son of God in some spiritual way which he wasn't before, but rather the proof, the evidence, the fruit that he is the Son of God.

He's acting and what takes place here is Jesus being himself. First of all, in his actions, in his being baptized and in his praying, but also in God's actions, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon him and the voice of the Father.

Jesus' baptism is spoken about in three of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Only John doesn't refer to the actual water baptism of Jesus. But in John's Gospel there's the mention of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus which John remembers very well.

Luke and Mark's accounts are like this, very short. Just matter of fact, Jesus is baptized. In Matthew's account we're told that when Jesus first came to John, John said, no, you should be baptizing me.

[15 : 43] I can't baptize you. Until Jesus explained to him why it was necessary and John agreed and baptized him. Now here's a question. We read there, didn't we, earlier in verse 3 of chapter 3 that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

So when Jesus comes to be baptized does Jesus need forgiveness for his sins? Is Jesus repenting of something that he's done wrong?

John doesn't give us, sorry, Luke doesn't give us an explanation, does he? But we can understand the reasons for Jesus' baptism from the words in Matthew. Remember I said that John said, no, I should be baptized by you.

What was the explanation that Jesus gave? Jesus told John that he should baptize him to fulfill all righteousness. To fulfill all righteousness.

Righteousness is basically the same as God's will, his good and pleasing will. What is right is righteous, God's good, pleasing will. What is wrong is unrighteous, that which goes against God's will.

[16 : 55] That's the simple way to understand sin, isn't it? Sin is simply going against the will of God. And Jesus is literally saying this, I need to be baptized, I must be baptized because it's my Father's will.

It's what God wants me to do, it's the right thing to do. And Jesus, as the Son of God, is carrying out his Father's will. That was the whole purpose of his life.

That was the very reason he came into this world. He says to his disciples in John and chapter 4, my food, my food is to do the will of him who sent me.

I live for this. And so again, we see so importantly that Jesus' will and the will of his heavenly Father are one and the same and the Holy Spirit too.

At this baptism of Jesus and these events that we read about, we have the three persons of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, three persons of the Trinity as we know it, each acting individually and yet together in unity at the same time.

[18 : 02] It's an amazing thing. It was their one will that Jesus should be baptized with water at the outset, the beginning of his public ministry, at the start of his life's mission to save sinners.

And this baptism that Jesus experiences with water is a sign pointing forward to a baptism he was yet to experience. It wasn't because he was a sinner.

It wasn't because he needed repentance. It was because he came to save sinners by his death that he was baptized. Jesus says just later on in Luke, I have a baptism to undergo and what constraint I'm under until it's completed.

He's talking about his suffering and his death. We looked at this a little bit, didn't we, when we talked about what baptism is, when we looked at John's baptism. A baptism, an experience, I have to go through something which will unite me with sinners.

I will stand in their place. I will bear their punishment. I will suffer their death. And in one sense this baptism with water is Jesus saying that I'm committed to the baptism of the cross.

[19 : 21] I'm committed to being one with and taking the place of those who have broken God's commandments. Jesus was baptized because he is the Son of God.

Because he is the Savior. Because he's the one who's come to rescue sinners. But notice this, that Jesus prays as he was praying.

It's the first time we've heard of Jesus praying, isn't it? But it's certainly not the last. When you go through the Gospels you find again and again Jesus in prayer. Luke tells us later on in chapter 5 Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Over and over again we're told about the prayer life of Jesus. Why do we pray? Why do any of us pray? It's usually because we need some help.

It's usually because we want something. God to do something for us. Well, we pray for others as we did just before as well. Usually those are the main reasons why we pray, the main motivations we pray.

[20 : 29] There's a sense of need for ourselves or for others. But Jesus prayed because he is the Son of God. He prayed because he is in a loving relationship with his Heavenly Father.

What a wonderful thing we get when we go through the Gospels, particularly John's, is we get to eavesdrop on the prayers of Jesus. You can tell a lot from somebody by how they pray.

Not whether they're eloquent, but how they pray. We get to hear our Jesus' prayers. There's him praying at the graveside of his friend Lazarus. Father, I thank you that you've heard me.

Then there's the night before his death, that wonderful prayer in John 17. Father, the hour has come. And even as he's on the cross, crucified, that's the most amazing prayer the universe has ever heard.

Father, forgive them. They do not know what they're doing. Always his prayers are, Father, Father, Father. Do you find prayer difficult?

[21 : 33] Do you struggle with praying? Struggle with, what words should I use? Struggle with, am I saying the right thing?

Do we find ourselves drying out when we pray? Do we find, do we think of prayer sort of like one of those duties that we should do? I know that, you know, we're told that we should pray every day, so I do it every day, either on my bedside or somewhere before I go to bed or in the morning.

It's something, and reading the Bible and going to church, these are the things that are expected of me. It's the reason that we find those things difficult because we do not know who we are.

It's the reason that those things are a duty and sometimes a struggle and difficult because actually we do not realize that we are a child of God. Firstly and foremostly, before anything else, we are a child of God, a son and daughter of our Heavenly Father.

We're not primarily, if I can put it this way, we're not primarily a believer in Jesus, but we're someone who is loved by our Heavenly Father. All that we do is to overflow from who we are.

[22 : 54] We're not children of God because we believe. We're not children of God because we pray. We're not children of God because we sing at church or go to church or read our Bibles.

We do those things and more besides because we are children of God. That's what children of God do. Think about that in other relationships.

Think about this in a broader concept. Let me hopefully help you to grasp this a little better. Does a girl marry her sweetheart because she must or because she loves him?

Does a man visit his sick mum because she expects him to or because he's her son? Do friends meet up in a cafe because they have no coffee at home or because they love to talk to one another?

You know what I'm saying? The thing, this is where we've often got it wrong and certainly the world has and it's influenced our thinking as well. Why do we act differently in our closest, most precious, longest lasting relationship that with our Heavenly Father?

[24 : 07] Why do we act differently to Him than we do to everybody else? All we are, all we do, all we think is to be the natural, normal results of being a child of God.

And I have to confess to you, dear friends, if I really comprehended that myself, it would revolutionize the way I lived. And the same with you. But Jesus prayed because he was the Son of God.

Because he had a relationship with his Father. Because it was the natural, normal thing for him to do. And when you read, every time he's got a few moments spare, which isn't much, he's off praying.

He's off spending time. He's not praying because he desperately needs the Father's help, if I can put it that way. He's not praying because his life is so difficult and so troubled. He's praying because he loves his Father.

And his Father loves him. And notice what happens when Jesus prays. As he was praying, heaven was opened. That doesn't mean the clouds sort of parted and the sun began to shine, if I can put it that way.

[25 : 16] It means more than that. It means a window into God's presence is opened. A window into the heavenly spiritual realm is opened. Stephen, the first man to be martyred for his faith, had a similar experience.

Acts 7 tells us that as he was praying, he says, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He gets a wonderful sense of being in the presence of God as he's praying.

And so when Jesus is praying, what's happening? He's speaking with his Father face to face. The barrier is removed. Any problem is removed. Any hindrance is removed.

And as the Son speaks to the Father, so the Father speaks to the Son. You are my Son, whom I love. With you I'm well pleased.

This is the wonderful thing that happens when we pray. Do you realize that? When you and I pray, we're brought into the presence of God. The windows of heaven are open.

[26 : 19] We are allowed in to the very presence of our heavenly Father. And what is it that we do when we enter into the presence of the Father? We're in that place where he longs to tell us that he loves us.

He longs to speak to us of how he delights in us. He wants us to know who we are. You're my Son. You're my daughter. Yes, those are unique words to Jesus.

You're my Son, whom I love. With you I'm well pleased. But they're the expression of the Father's heart to every single one of his children, to you and I as well. Why is it that we doubt his love for us?

Why is it that there are times when we think that God is unhappy with us? Why is it that we forget that we are the children of God and allow sin to have its place in our lives?

Is it because we are so rarely in fellowship with him? Is it because we are so quick to say our prayers, to get them done, to fulfill the daily duty as it were, that we never have time to listen to what the Father has to say to us?

[27 : 36] And as the Son of God enjoys fellowship with the Father, so God the Holy Spirit descends upon him visibly as well. the Holy Spirit to me comes and embraces the Son of God.

It must have been something that Jesus not only saw but felt. And again, dear friends, isn't that what we long for when we pray? Isn't that what we desire?

Isn't that what we, more than anything else in our hearts, is to feel, to know, to experience that we are loved of God. Some of you have known that. Most of us at some point in our lives have experienced that but we haven't for such a long time that we've forgotten.

And isn't the key again here, prayer. Oh Lord, come down. Let me know, let me know, let me know that I'm a child of yours.

The Holy Spirit is a person just as much as the Father and the Son are persons of the Trinity and here they are all together. each person interacting with the other at the outset of Jesus' ministry confirming their one will and purpose that Jesus should suffer and die as our Savior upon the cross.

[28 : 55] He should be baptized and united and one with those who have sinned against God. That he should fulfill all righteousness making it possible even for us to be saved.

And here they are sharing in the plan of salvation that plan that they agreed determined purpose before the world was made. The very coming of the Son of God was the agreement of the Trinity that God had.

That's a mystery to us, isn't it? Here's an incredible mystery as we're given a peep into the relationship of the Trinity. It's a truth we joyfully believe but can't fully understand.

They are doing if I can put it this way what comes naturally to the Godhead. They are being who they are the persons of the Trinity interrelating loving caring speaking sharing and dear friends do you know what?

Dear children of God you and I have been brought into that love. That's exactly what Jesus teaches us. That's exactly what the Bible is all about.

[30 : 05] That's exactly the reason why Jesus came. It was yes to save us from hell and the punishment we deserve. Yes it was bringing us into heaven and eternal life but the main the chief the wonderful motivation of the love of God in saving us is this to bring us into the embrace and the experience of his love to bring us back into the people we were meant and created to be the children of God.

Jesus says this in John 14 anyone who loves me will obey my teaching my father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them.

How much more wonderful can it be? And even the Holy Spirit himself we're told lives with you and will be in you. Everyone who has fallen in love with Jesus is now forever wrapped up in the love of the Godhead Father, Son and Holy Spirit we have depersonalized salvation we have robbed the gospel of its core which is God with us all of all that the Godhead do all that the persons of the Trinity do they do they do out of love for us God's children therefore all that we do dear friends is to flow out of our love for the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit everything they do comes from the love that they have in their relationship with us and all that we do is to flow from the love that we have in the relationship with them how is that with you is that true of you is that true of your prayer life is that true of your Bible reading is that true of your church coming is that true of your service is it true of your relationships with one another is it true of the way you speak and the way you think does it all flow from does it all come from the fact that

I am a child of God and that I am his and he is mine and that I am loved and that I love if that isn't the case if that isn't the case I suspect for many of us it isn't it's because of two things either it's because we are not yet a child of God which means we have not yet received the Lord Jesus as we should here's what John writes in the beginning of his gospel to all who did receive him that's Jesus to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God the power the authority and if what I've been saying all the way through this sermon is to you alien and strange and odd and completely confusing it's because you're not yet a child of God but it may also be dear friends that there are some of us who are children of God but we just don't realize it either we've forgotten it or somehow we've just never taken hold of this wonderful truth we don't know who we really are but this is what

John writes in his first letter chapter 3 see look behold what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are open your eyes see saying open your eyes and see that this amazing love God has poured out and lavished upon you through his son the Lord Jesus Christ means that you are his children he's done it because he loves you with a heavenly father's love like no other and you are his child however you feel however you think whatever goes wrong whatever goes right whatever people say to you whatever Monday morning is like at work none of those things change this truth you are loved because you are a child of God and a child of God you must be and if these things are true of either one of you if you're one of those people here this morning who says I'm not yet a child of God or you're someone who says

[34 : 24] I haven't really realized and grasped and taken on board I'm a child of God then like me you need to pray you need to pray Lord open the heavens open the heavens for me and come down with your Holy Spirit that I might hear your voice and know who I am through Jesus Christ your son let's do that even now I'm going to pray and if you want to pray that prayer with me then pray it with me and then a moment or two after I finish praying bring your own personal prayers to God let us pray Father in heaven your greatest desire is for me to know that I am your child

I ask that you would open heaven and come down by your Holy Spirit that you would make me to know that I am a child of God forgive me my sins forgive me that in my life I've lived in opposition to you and your love come and fill me with that knowledge of who I am in Jesus your son and cause my life to be lived a life of love a life being loved a life for you thank you that you hear me when I pray and that you answer me when I pray may this stay forward may I know that I am yours and you are mine and may my life be lived fully and completely out of love for you amen see what great love the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are the reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him dear friends now we are children of God amen do yeah