

John 10:17

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[0:00] Well, thank you, Paul, for your kind welcome. It's a pleasure to be with you this morning.

It was a delight to share in Gethin and Katie's wedding! But God is rich in mercy and is long-suffering, and we're just delighted to share in the happy occasion. I'd like this morning to consider with you profound words that we read in verse 17 of John chapter 10.

For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. For this reason, the Father loves me. Augustine, the remarkable early church father, late 4th, early 5th century, preached through the Gospel of John, and he stated on one occasion, the Gospel of John is shallow enough for a child to paddle in and deep enough for an elephant to swim in.

[1:34] And when you read through the Gospel of John, you immediately understand what Augustine meant. You read beautifully crafted narratives that just sweep you along with their simplicity, their richness, their evocativeness.

Think of Jesus' encounter with the woman in John chapter 8. It's vivid, it's powerful, it's imaginative. And Augustine himself, as he comes to the conclusion of his exposition, says, there remained but two, misery and mercy.

And all of the encounters that the Lord Jesus has are so simple at one level. They just sweep you along with their beautiful simplicity.

And then also you have these remarkable egocentric statements of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was uninhibitedly egocentric.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

[2:56] And so when you read through John's Gospel, you quickly discover that you can read this Gospel to your children in their almost infancy and confront them with the beauty, the simplicity, the richness of language that you find throughout John's Gospel.

But then, of course, there are places in John where you find yourself utterly out of your depth. Think of the opening words of the Gospel, which really are the window through which we are to read the whole Gospel.

John has written his Gospel, you remember, at the end of chapter 20, so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing we may have life in his name.

The Gospel of John is an evangelistic tract, 15,635 words long, at least in the Greek text.

And so from beginning to end, John is out not simply to inform us, but to persuade us. And right at the outset, he confronts us with profundity that takes us totally out of all our comfort zones.

[4:19] In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

And John deliberately, right at the outset of his Gospel, confronts us with profundity. Almost to make us gasp. And to leave us wondering, who is this Jesus?

And so Augustine really, I think, is profoundly right when he says, the Gospel is shallow enough for children to paddle in, but it's deep enough for elephants to swim in.

And it's this out-of-our-depth passage in verse 17 in particular that I want to reflect on with you this morning.

For this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

[5:29] Now, from times eternal, the Son of God was the adoring object of his Father's love.

Think of how the Lord God Almighty punctuates history on three occasions to declare, this is my beloved Son.

There was never a time when the Son was not beheld in love by his Father. The Holy Trinity is a communion of love.

God is love. God is not a solitary monad as in Islam. He is a communion, a community, a fellowship, a triad of love.

And from times eternal, the Father beheld the Son with a love that had no beginning and that had no ending. This is Christianity 101.

[6:36] It's so basic, isn't it? It's where we begin our thinking about the gospel of God. Now read verse 17.

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

I've often pondered these words. I remember, I can't remember when it was, it must be many, many, many, many, many years ago now that I first read them, and was arrested immediately by them.

For this reason the Father loves me? But surely you were loved, Lord Jesus, as the Son of the Father from times eternal. What do you mean, for this reason the Father loves you?

How are we to understand Jesus' words here? Well, very simply in this way, that God the Father's love for his Son is multi-dimensional, multifaceted.

[7:51] First of all, as I've already said, there is his love of eternal complacency, his love of sheer delight in who his Son is.

The Son is autotheos. He is God in himself. He doesn't owe his Godhead to the Father, but he is the Son of the Father.

And as the Father beheld his equal, but the Son, who eternally was begotten of him, he ever beheld him in love.

The Son needed to do nothing to merit the love of his Father. By virtue of who he is, the heart of the Father, if I can use such language, the heart of the Father was ever traveling to his Son.

Beholding the Son was the Father's delight in eternity. If you like, this is the love of witness that John has hinted at right at the beginning of his Gospel.

[9:18] In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. Literally, almost, the Word was face to face with God. And the Word was God.

There was an eternal witness to the relationship of the Father and of the Son. And so there is, first of all, then, this love of eternal complacency.

But secondly, and it's this that Jesus is speaking about here, there is the Father's love of responsive admiration.

He loved the Son from times eternal by virtue of who he is. But here, there is a new dimension unfolding in the Father's love to the Son.

The love of responsive admiration. Because Jesus here is speaking in his anointed and appointed capacity as the mediator, the redeemer of God's elect.

[10:33] He is here in his holy humanity, giving to the Father that obedience that he had pledged to him in times eternal in the covenant of redemption.

Here I am. I delight to do your will, O God, as we find it in the 40th Psalm.

He has come into the world in obedience to his Father. And that obedience that he pledged in times eternal was an obedience that would take him from glory to Golgotha.

Now, you must not think that in times eternal, the Son of God understood what it would mean for him to become flesh and take that holy humanity to the cross of Calvary.

that's why in the Garden of Gethsemane, as the horror of what awaited him approached him inexorably, and as his human soul began to taste what it would mean for him to be obedient unto death, he shrank back.

[12:03] Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours be done.

Here he stands in his holy, fragile, frail humanity, and he is standing as the one who is pledged in love to the Father to be obedient unto death, a death that would be for him the death of a sinner.

He himself in himself, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, but in our place he would stand cursed and condemned.

he would bear the wrath of God, the righteous wrath of God that our sin deserved.

And as the Father watches the obedience of his Son, the Son that he loved from times eternal, a new love bursts forth from God the Father.

[13:25] the love of a Father's admiration for an obedient, loving Son. And this is what Jesus is speaking about here.

For this reason the Father loves me in my capacity, in my ordained, anointed capacity as the Redeemer of God's elect, as the one who had come into the world to be the Savior of the world. who would die the just for the unjust to reconcile sinners to God. In that capacity, new love bursts forth from heaven.

Now perhaps you're thinking as you listen this morning, well Ian, how then are we to understand the deafening silence of heaven as the Lord Jesus Christ hung on Calvary's cross?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And he was truly forsaken me. He wasn't imagining being forsaken.

[14:45] He said, why have you forsaken me? He was forsaken of God as he became our sin atoning, wrath quenching sacrifice in our place on Calvary's cross.

How are we to understand the deafening silence? Certainly he was forsaken. but not for one moment was he unloved.

I'm persuaded that the father's love for his son, his love of responsive admiration for his son, reached its omega point, its highest point.

As he forsook his son on Calvary's cross. I remember yet some years ago now a good friend of mine preaching and he said, even as the father was laying upon him the iniquity of us all, he was saying, if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, tis now.

as the father beholds the son, as our appointed representative, about to be offered up as an atoning sacrifice for sin, the love of responsive admiration bursts forth from heaven.

[16:35] Now, what I really want to focus on with you this morning, with that as the prelude, is to make this profound point, I think, that this pattern of eternal love and responsive admiring love is reflected in the love that the Lord Jesus has for his people.

If you turn over to John chapter 15, you'll see the point, I hope. John 15 at verse 9.

As the father has loved me, so have I loved you, abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandments, and abide in his love.

Just as the father's love for his son is multidimensional, so the son's love for his people is multidimensional.

We have been loved in Christ from times eternal. Gerhardus Voss, the remarkable Dutch biblical theologian, put it astonishing when he said, the reason God will never stop loving you is because he never began to love you.

[18:20] I have loved you, Jeremiah 31, with an everlasting love. He has loved us with a love that is no beginning and that has no ending. And the reason he will never stop loving his people is because he never began to love them.

electing gracious, sure, certain, unchanging love. But, along with this unchanging love, there is a love of responsive admiration.

Jesus says, we will abide in his love if you keep my commandments, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love.

If Jesus had deviated one iota from his pledged obedience to the father, he would have forfeited the father's love of responsive admiration.

That's what he says. If you keep my commandments, just as I have kept my father's commandments, and abide in his love. Now, here is the point I really want to leave with you and with myself this morning.

[19:36] The Lord Jesus never stops loving his people in our weakness, in our fragility, in our failures. He never stops loving us.

We are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. We have been united to him indissolubly by the Holy Spirit. He will never stop loving us.

But, his love can be grieved by our sin. His love can be grieved. I can never read what Paul writes in Ephesians 4 about grieving the Holy Spirit without stopping and pausing and thinking, Lord, does someone like me, a worm of the earth?

Am I able to grieve God? Am I able to disappoint you and grieve you, the unchanging, unchangeable, triune God who is from everlasting to everlasting?

Yes, the Bible tells me so. Philosophically, you might say, ah, but Ian, Ian, Ian, God is impassable. [20:58] who would deny it? I am the Lord, I change not. That I read in his word, I can grieve his spirit.

In all our afflictions, the Bible tells me he is afflicted. I would rather live by the text of Holy Scripture than by the logical, philosophical teachings of Thomas Aquinas.

There's a mystery here, there's a profundity here, but we are to live on the basis of the revealed word of God. God can be grieved by our sin, and in the same way, his love can be heightened by our loving, wholehearted obedience.

as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Notice the parallelism, abide in my love, and if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

This is all simply to say this, if you take anything away with you this morning, take this away with you. Our Savior takes a special delight in his people's loving obedience.

[22:29] Now, obedience in no way contributes to our salvation, we know that. It is all of grace, from beginning to end. As Paul prayed, even the faith with which we believe, that even that trembling faith is itself the very gift of God's grace.

obedience contributes nothing to our standing before God, but your heart obedience can delight your God.

And so the question I really want to ask this morning is very simple. Do you not want to delight the Lord? Do you not want to please him?

Do you not want to show in your life that he is your greatest good? That he is the king before whom you bow, the savior whom you embrace?

Do you not want to delight him and please him? for this reason the father loves me? Because I lay down in obedience to him my life for my sheep.

[23:56] Loving obedience is the new lifestyle of the Christian believer. It is the new lifestyle that every Christian believer is brought into through the gospel.

And do you know why? I'm sure already you anticipate my next statement. Because what does the gospel do? It unites us to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And who is this Lord Jesus Christ to whom we have been united as branches to the vine? He is the obedient, loving son of the father. And the obedient, loving nature of the God man flows by the ministry of the spirit into our lives.

And we are being changed from one degree of glory to another. And what are these degrees of glory? They are degrees of loving obedience to the holy will of the father revealed in his word.

There's a wonderful statement Paul makes in Romans 6. You'll come to it. We've been following a little these services, Joan and I, and just love being with you on a number of occasions through Romans.

[25:17] You'll come to Romans 6, 17, where Paul uses very striking language. He says that through the gospel we have been poured into a mold.

And that mold is the person of the Son of God. It's not a doctrinal mold. Well, it is a doctrinal mold, but the doctrine is embedded in the person of the Son.

You never separate the doctrines of the gospel from the one who is himself the doctrine of the gospel, Jesus Christ. And Paul says the gospel comes and it pours us idiosyncratically.

We don't all become clones of one another. We are to become clones of the God man, Jesus Christ, in our own idiosyncratic humanity. And as we seek to live out our lives of loving obedience, bursts of responsive, admiring love comes from heaven.

God that only does the father say this is my beloved son. Do you see the loving obedience that he is giving me even unto the death of a cross that he cannot yet mentally, emotively, spiritually comprehend?

[26:49] end. Take that to ourselves. I've little doubt. Remember with Job, God says to Satan, behold my servant Job. Would you not want the father to be saying to the angelic hosts this morning, behold that daughter of mine, do you see? The loving obedience that she unreservedly gives to me. Do you see that devoted little boy, girl who is seeking in the simplicity of their union with Christ to please me? We've been loved with an everlasting love.

It has no beginning, it will have no end, but embedded within that there are bursts of heavenly admiration. I think it's one of the hallmarks of the new birth.

How do I know I've been born again? Because, you know, some of your mothers, some births are dramatic, not so many actually, most, well what do I know? But I've had four, I've watched four births. One was pretty dramatic and the other three just happened to appear. Well don't ask Joan that, but they can have happened to appear. And you say, well how do I know I've been born again? Well let me simply ask you. In your heart of hearts, do you long to please the Lord? Lord, I've been tempted to live a life that will bring forth from him bursts of loving admiration. The reason the Father loves me, who had loved me from times eternal, but the reason he now loves me is that I lay down my life for my sheep. Loving, unreserved obedience brings forth bursts of heavenly admiration.