

# Perfect

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[ 0 : 00 ] Excellent. Well, let me encourage you friends to keep that passage in Luke chapter 4 open in front of you. And really my aim this morning is to get one word in our minds.

And it's one word that I hope is the match that lights the fuse to the dynamite that is this passage. Particularly this time of year, to be clear on this, what we're going to be thinking about this morning, we'll do our souls the world of goods.

Now, to try and get us to that word, let me tell you about something that happened recently in the world of darts. Okay, any darts enthusiasts out there? Particularly after Friday night, Luke Littler, 17 years old.

I still can't believe somebody makes a living out of playing darts, let alone becoming a multimillionaire at the age of 17. But there you go. If you're not familiar with how darts works, here's your headlines.

You start at 5.01. This is how it happens. You start at 5.01. And the aim is to beat your opponent and getting down to zero. That's the aim of the game in darts, right?

[ 1 : 09 ] Now, technically, in darts enthusiasts, you can help me with the answer here. Technically, you can do that in how many darts? Nine, right? You can do that in nine darts.

Nine darts. And at the recent PDC World Championships, a man called Christian Kist did it. He did it in nine darts, what they call a nine darter. Crowd went wild.

He walked away with, get this, 60 grand just for that feat. Now, if you weren't interested before, you're certainly interested now, right? 60 grand for pulling off a nine darter. Here's the reason I think our culture goes crazy for darts.

It is because it's one of the few sports where you can be perfect, right? Every other sport that we play, you can play well.

Somebody can have a blinder. Somebody can be unplayable. Somebody can be sparkling superlatives everywhere. But darts is one of these few sports where technically, technically, you can be perfect.

[ 2 : 11 ] And there's our word in your mind. It's the word perfect. And let me take us from the world of darts to our lives at the outset of 2024, right?

Because that concept is in the air right now, being perfect, right? Or certainly trying to aim towards a new year, a new us.

I heard that phrase this time of year. It's what we love to use, isn't it? A new year, a new us. And we're all thinking of ways that we can be a better version of us in the year ahead, right?

Bigger, fitter, healthier, faster, stronger, more able. And I'm here to tell us this morning and remind my own soul that that's a pressure that we just don't need in life.

My one aim this morning is to help us savor the one person who is perfect. And it's not us. And it's not us. Because this year might be about those things.

[ 3 : 14 ] I've got no idea. But here's my question for you. What if it's not? For all we know, it might be the exact opposite of those things.

Because if the year 2020 taught us anything, is that we have no idea what tomorrow holds. We really don't. Do you know why I call it? I call it the year of the ostrich, right?

Year of the ostrich. Because I hear people talking about what happened in 2020 in our world. And it's as if we'll put our heads in the sand and pretend it never happened. Like we haven't learned the lessons of that season of life that really we have got no idea.

No idea what the future holds. And our lives are so, so fragile. And yet we run around thinking that we are immortal. And that's why my one goal is to help us take in the one who is perfect.

And understand why savoring him is such good news. Because life this year is not to be found in being a better us. Life, true life is to be found.

[ 4 : 16 ] And true rest is to be found in embracing the truer Jesus. And this passage in Luke comes hot off the heels of Christmas. Chapters 1 and 2, Luke showed us how and where Jesus came.

Right? Mary, Zechariah, shepherds, Bethlehem. It's what Luke's been doing in the opening two chapters. Chapter 3 is all about who Jesus is. Right?

He's sequential. He's moving on. Who Jesus is. And we get John the Baptist, this forerunner to Jesus. We get Jesus' baptism. You have Jesus.

You have the Spirit. And you have the voice from heaven. Heaven. So you have, friends, follow the logic. You have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all in the same situation.

And we're meant to be thinking, when was the last time that happened in the Bible story? It happened at creation. Right? The Father, the Son, and the Spirit happened at creation. We're meant to read this and think about God is up to something here.

[ 5 : 20 ] And then we get Jesus' family tree in chapter 4. Or sorry, the end of chapter 3. Luke begins to flesh out his family tree.

Who this Jesus is. And in chapter 4, Luke begins to flesh out for us why Jesus came. And the clue to this is in the very last verse of chapter 3.

If you've got the text there, come with me and see this. The very last verse of chapter 3. Luke wants us to see at verse 37. Who Jesus is related to.

And who does he trace it all the way back to? Where does this family tree go all the way? See it in the text. Who is it? It's Adam. It's Adam.

Now I found a great website this week. It's called World Population Clock Live. If you're bored this afternoon. It's well worth going to.

[ 6 : 22 ] You can find out what number person you are in the world. According to your birthday. Big anniversary coming up for me on the 10th of January, year 2033. I'll be the 6th billionth person to be alive in the world.

It's in the diary. But here's the thing. See when we talk about Adam. Here is human being number one. Number one.

That's the significance of Adam. That's the connection that Luke wants us to see. Jesus comes from him. Now let me show you why that matters.

We have to go on a journey here through the Bible story. Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. God creates the world out of nothing. And he places Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Now why is the Garden of Eden significant in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2? For its beauty, absolutely. But it's significant because this is the place where God and mankind dwell in perfect harmony together.

[ 7 : 28 ] God creates this place. God creates this place. He puts Adam and Eve there to steward his good creation for his glory under his rule for their flourishing.

And let me just say, that is where we will flourish as human beings. Not out with, not going it independently, not going it on our own. We flourish when we come to have a relationship with our creator.

Makes sense, doesn't it? Have you ever tried to build an Ikea flat pack with a furniture? Tried to do it without the creator's instructions? It always goes wrong.

This is where mankind flourishes. That's the blueprint. But someone else appears in the garden. The devil appears in the garden.

Crafty and created. That's what we're told there. Genesis 3 verse 1. There he is. He's masquerading as a serpent. And he starts speaking to Adam and Eve.

[ 8 : 29 ] The devil is not silent. He is also preaching. In the words of Hugh Latimer in a sermon he preached in at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1548.

The devil is the most diligent preacher in all the realm. He's always feeding mankind a vision of greatness. And where true life is to be found.

And his word is always out to undermine God. In the words of Roy Keane, the football pundit, that's his job. What he says to Adam and Eve, and this is a pincer movement, right?

He says to Adam and Eve, Genesis 3, pincer 1, he seeks to undermine the authority of God. What is he saying? Keep these in your mind for where we're going. Did God really say?

Did God really say? Pincer 2, he seeks to undermine the goodness of God. Gil did not say. He knows when you eat of that fruit, you will be like him.

[ 9 : 29 ] And Adam and Eve, they buy it. And they eat the fruit from the tree that God had specifically said for them not to eat from.

And here's the thing. It's a bait and a switch. Satan promised life and freedom. He held that out to Adam and Eve. And instead, what did they get?

They get shame and guilt. Bait and switch. And Adam and Eve are banished from the garden. And from their sin sneeze, all of creation and every human being ever since catches this sin cold.

And right here, life is not ended, but life is now cursed. And let's be clear that God would be compromising on his holiness if he failed to do that.

But what God does in the moment, in Genesis 3, 15, is that he pronounces in that moment to Satan. And get this, we've got to get this, right?

[ 10 : 34 ] Pronounces in that moment to Satan that he will raise up someone from whose line? From Adam's line. Who will come and will crush Satan decisively.

And in the process, he will undo all the catastrophic effects of the fall. Now, how is he going to do that? Because this one who will come from Adam's line will be everything and do everything that Adam failed to be and do.

God promises to send and to raise up a better Adam. And so here is Jesus descended from whom? Adam. But Jesus didn't come to a garden where Adam started. Verse 1 of Luke chapter 4. Jesus comes to the wilderness where Adam ended.

And so Jesus in the wilderness. Here's the thing that Luke wants us to know. It's not like he's gone on a trip, got lost, and done the stereotypical male thing and been too stubborn to ask for directions, right?

[ 11 : 53 ] Who leads him there in Luke chapter 4? Who leads Jesus into the wilderness? The Spirit leads him there.

Which tells you what? Which tells us what? That what's going on here is wonderfully deliberate. It's got purpose to it. And it's full of meaning.

And Satan appears. And what is Satan doing? Satan is preaching. Temptation 1. Do you see? It's an attempt to make Jesus question his identity.

If you are the Son of God, make these stones become bread. Jesus knows his identity is not something to be flaunted. It's earthed in a relationship of loving obedience to his Father.

And so Jesus says, man shall not live by bread alone. Temptation 2 is an attempt to make Jesus fast track his destiny.

[ 13 : 02 ] I will give you authority if you bow down and worship me. That's the devil's play. And to be honest, he's half right. Because Jesus' life is going to end with all authority being given to him.

But not because it's been given to him by Satan. Only because it's been given to him by his Father. Only because he was first willing to go to the cross to carry out his plan to save his people.

And so Jesus thunders back, worship the Lord God and serve him only. Temptation 3 is an attempt to make Jesus rethink his priority.

Throw yourself down from here. The devil quotes there from Psalm 91. Clearly the devil knows the scriptures. It's a psalm if you look at it. It's all about God's protection over his people.

But right at the end of that psalm, why does God protect his people? Not because they test him. But because my beloved ones love me and honor me.

[ 14 : 17 ] But let's stand back for a moment. Lest we get lost in the detail. And look at this from above. Do a compare and contrast. Friends, do you hear the echoes of the serpent in Eden in Luke chapter 4?

Did God really say? Gives Jesus the offer of authority. You will be like him. In other words, the essence of the lies that Satan tempted Adam with, he tempts Jesus with.

And here's the beauty of this. Where Adam failed miserably, Jesus passes with flying colors. Here is one who has come to be perfect.

And the scene ends, verse 13, with Satan leaving to return at an opportune time. Now the question is, when is that opportune time? The next time we see the devil is in Luke 22.

When Satan enters Judas. And Jesus' final earthly hours that began in betrayal end in crucifixion as he dies.

[ 15 : 28 ] And here's the conundrum. The perfect one is crucified. The perfect one, the sinless one, is impaled on a cross.

He is cursed. Now what on earth is going on there? Well, we need to go back to the garden. God says to Adam in Genesis 3, Did you eat from that tree?

Now friends, that is what they call in the business a closed question. Right? Laura Kusenberg. She makes a living out of this, doesn't she? Getting politicians on her BBC show and asking them questions and saying to them, All I need from you is a yes or a no answer.

The public want to know one way or another. And she's really good at it. Because what is the answer to that question? Did you eat from the fruit of the tree? What's the answer to that question? Someone help me out. It's yes. Yes is the answer. That could have been the shortest conversation ever. Yes is the answer. But instead of holding his hands up and saying guilty is charged, Where does Adam point in Genesis 3?

[ 16 : 41 ] He points and he says, This woman that you gave me. Do you see how there's two accusations in there from Adam? You gave me. In other words, he points the fault at God.

God, you're at fault here. There needs to be a product recall on the helper you designed for me. I hope you kept the receipt because you're going to have to take that one back. I'm innocent. She's guilty.

I'm not to blame. Put the blame on her. She needs to take the rap for this one so that I can be in the clear. That's Adam's play. But in wonderful contrast, friends, you see Jesus as the new Adam.

What's he doing on the cross? Adam's life began in the garden.

But it ended with him bringing his bride out with him out into the wilderness. Well, here is Jesus beginning in the wilderness.

[ 18 : 08 ] And he's come to bring his bride with him back to the garden. And so as we begin to draw this together, let me zoom in here and give us two little applications and then zoom out and give us one big application.

Okay? Two, one. Here's the two little applications. Here's number one. And particularly, friends, when we fail this year.

And when life doesn't go to plan. Maybe even when we drift into sin. When the devil does the bait and switch on us.

Maybe when we grow cold in our affections. When we think particularly that our performance causes us.

Sorry, particularly when our performance causes us to doubt whether God truly loves us. Whether we can be truly accepted in his sight. Here's the first one. Jesus has won the battle that we couldn't win.

[ 19 : 18 ] Jesus saves us, get this, by his doing as well as his dying. He saves us by his doing as well as his dying.

In other words, if Jesus had died for us, just died for us, in terms of our debt of sin, he would have gotten us back to zero. A clean slate.

But to be a Christian is to have our lives united to Jesus. Whereas before we were caught up in Adam. When Jesus saves us, buys us to himself, we are caught up in Jesus.

Caught up in Christ. And we're caught up to his perfect life. His perfect life of obedience and worship and wholeheartedness and sinlessness.

A life that we could not live. That life. His perfectly righteous life. That's the word the Bible uses. Righteousness.

[ 20 : 19 ] Just means perfect. God glorifying. That righteous life he shares with us. And so that means in God's eyes we are declared not just not guilty.

But we are declared fully righteous. So what? Let me just say that makes all the difference in the world. God looks on us the same way as he does his son.

Got to understand that. He looks on us. He doesn't love us any more on our good days and less on our bad days. Because our lives are united to Jesus, his love for us is steadfast.

And how does he love us? He loves us like he loves his son. Friends, you and I are not saved because of our righteousness. We're not saved because we perform.

We're not saved because we're good enough. We are saved simply because we have been brought up into Jesus' life. And that's what we sing if you clocked it in the first song. Simon, wherever you are, brilliant pick.

[ 21 : 21 ] My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. That's what that hymn, that's why Christians have sung it down the years because it's what it declares. He wins the battle that we couldn't win.

It's not on us. It's all about him. And number two, Jesus has broken the chains that we couldn't break. This really could be the year of change.

Do you know Oprah's message this year? It was all about, and I did Google it, how this is going to be a year for rebuilding for people.

Right? Rebuilding. What she said is this is an inside job. Change comes from within. And on one level, friends, that is so unhelpful.

It's so unhelpful, isn't it? Because many of us look inside here and we don't see a hero. We see a damsel in distress. It is not up to us.

[ 22 : 29 ] We do not have the capabilities to make this year perfect. But on another level, she's probably speaking a lot more truth than she knows. Because for the Christian, the power to change really does come from within.

But not because of us. It is because of the one who resides there. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, lives inside of us.

The same Spirit that led Jesus here. We've got the same Spirit living inside of us. Which means that we have the power to say no to sin.

And we have the power to say yes to God and His ways. And the Spirit transforms us inwardly. He gives us new resolutions.

Which means that this year really could be the year of change. It really could be. Not of our circumstances. Way bigger than that. But all to do with the thing that really matters in life.

[ 23 : 31 ] And the thing that God is really concerned about. About our characters. Could this year, friends, be the year of self-control? When we make progress in that area of our lives that continues to trip us up and clog us up.

When it comes to our love for and our pursuit of Jesus. Could this year be the year when prayer replaces anxiety?

Could this be the year when the hard wax of bitterness towards someone else melts and gives way to forgiveness?

When loving time in the Word replaces bingeing time on Netflix? Let me ask you as we step into another year. Where would you love to grow?

Where would you love to grow? Have you gone to God with that? Pray to Him, Lord, help me change. Where would you love to grow? And as we close, let me zoom out.

[ 24 : 47 ] And give you one big application here. And I just want to share with you the simplest and yet the most profound illustration of what this means for us.

And I read it recently. Unashamedly stole it from a guy called Andrew Wilson. And that book is beginning to look a lot like Christmas. If you've read it. Now we started out thinking about darts. Let me close with getting us to think about chess. We're all about the high octane sports this time of year. Now here's, I don't know anything about chess.

But here's the one thing I know about chess. Can I share it with you? Here's the one thing I know. I know what the most important piece on the board is. It's the king.

And the thing about it, chess, is it's the kind of game that you can be having a shocker. Right? Pawns falling all over the place.

[ 25 : 45 ] Strategy out the window. Your opponent can be absolutely dominating you in chess. You can see no way out. It feels like a defeat. But here's the thing in chess.

See if your king is still standing. Your king is still there. See no matter what happens to you, you're still in the game. Still in the game.

And because your king is still in the game, so are you. Now friends, we have no idea what this year holds. Absolutely. I gave up that game a long time ago.

Right? No idea what this year holds. For our world. For our families. For those that we love. For our health. For our futures.

For our employment. Our world could absolutely crumble this year. Could. But whatever happens, here's what you need to know. Here's what we need to know.

[ 26 : 45 ] That our king is always standing. And he's doing more than just standing. And this is what the ascension is. He's ruling and he's reigning in the place of all authority at God's right hand.

For us. Because when Jesus ascended to heaven, God was giving him all authority. That's what's going on. God is giving him all authority. Why? Because he lived this kind of life.

He lived this perfect life. And because he died this kind of death. He died this perfect death. As far as saviors go. Jesus. Is perfect.

New year. New us. I think I've come to the conclusion in my mind actually. Beginning of the year. It will probably be same me. But same Jesus.

Let me pray. And friends. Maybe just in the silence now. That question of. Where would you love to grow? Why not just take it to God in prayer just now?

[ 27 : 54 ] Where would we love to grow? And so the words of Romans chapter 5.

For if by the trespass of the one man. Death reigned through that one man. How much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace.

And the gift of righteousness reign in the life through the one man. Jesus Christ. Father. So Father. We thank you that we stand here today as.

Those of us who put our faith in Jesus. We are standing here today loved by you. Cherished. Not because of what we have done or who we are. Thank you that you love us because our lives have been united to Jesus.

Father. Lord. I pray for many of us this year. Maybe this particular season. Lord. We are struggling with doubts. We're struggling with guilt. We've got all sorts of questions. And fears about the year ahead.

[ 28 : 57 ] Lord. May just a knowledge of who Jesus is. And his beauty. And his kingship. May it just come with a fresh power this morning. Lord.

We pray this year that you would help us become more like him. Lord. Thank you that because of your spirit dwelling inside of us. Really nothing is off the table when it comes to our characters.

Lord. We long to be more like him. So Father. We thank you for your love for us. It's steadfast. It's never changing. Lord. Help us fix our eyes on the person of your son.

We pray in his wonderful name. Amen.