

Self-sufficiency

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 November 2020

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. It's lovely to have you with us today, particularly if this is maybe your first time here, maybe that's the first time that we've met. It's just so lovely to have you with us this morning. Let me just give my welcome to those who are joining us online as well.

Now, I'm conscious that we've been sitting for about 40, 45 minutes. So here's what I want you to do. If you're in the building, you do this at home if you want as well, feel free. Why don't we stand? Let's stand. And I don't know, maybe you just want to relax any muscles, get any yawns out of your system, because these pews do funny things to my back when I sit.

So maybe just kind of get yourself awake this morning and maybe look around, see who's here, give a little nod to people, acknowledge them. And then let me just read some words from Philippians chapter three.

This is what I pray is true of us as we encounter God, as we hear his word this morning. Paul would write this. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ, my Lord. And so that's our prayer as we head into this passage this morning, that we would see Jesus's all-surpassing worth.

[1 : 2 0] So with that in mind, have a seat. That was for free. It wasn't even in my notes, okay? So here's a question to get us thinking this morning. When was the last time, and get this in your minds, but a mental exercise as we begin.

When was the last time that you tasted something, and you tasted it, and oh, man alive, honestly, it just made you want to be sick? Okay, we're far enough away from lunchtime, I feel I can get away with that one.

When was the last time you tasted something, and it made you want to be sick? Okay, maybe you're one of 47% of the people, apparently, in the UK who gag at the taste of an oyster.

Okay, maybe you're one of 34% of people in the UK who say that they wretch at the smell, or the texture, or the taste of blue cheese. Okay, I do that. My wife loves blue cheese.

Every time I open the fridge, oh, it hits me like a brick wall. Maybe you're one of almost 40% of people, apparently, in the UK who say, and I think this is hugely unfair, that they cannot stand the taste of a black pudding.

[2 : 2 3] Okay, now, if ever there's going to be a food that makes it to heaven, it's going to be a store-in-law black pudding in my books, okay? If you haven't tasted it, give it a try. But here's what I want you to do. Whatever that food is, I want you to get it in your mind.

And I want you to recall, tap into something of that, get that out of me, get that out of my stomach sensation and that feeling. And when you've got it, come with me to Revelation chapter 3 and to this church in Laodicea.

Now, here's the striking thing about what Jesus says to this church as we encounter it in Revelation 3. He tastes this church. And it's as if he says, in fact, he does say, he says, I just want to spit you out.

I taste you and you make me sick. Which is hugely striking, isn't it? We've got to ask ourselves why he says that.

Now, here's what is historically true about life in Laodicea in this day. The drinking water is terrible.

[3 : 3 1] Okay, and here's why. These folks don't have their own water supply. So what they need to do is they need to pipe it in from nearby cities.

So you have Colossae, which is the city to the east. And Colossae has lovely, fresh, cold water. By the time that they pipe it in all the way to Laodicea, what has happened is that water that was really cool and lovely has warmed up so that it's tepid.

And the second place these guys go for their water is Hierapolis, which is the city to the north. And Hierapolis has lovely, warm water. But by the time it makes it to Laodicea, it too has gone tepid. So you bring these things together. And what happens when you turn on the tap in Laodicea is what comes out is tepid, stinking water. Because you can imagine to get the water to the city is going to go through these old stinking pipes.

So you turn on the tap in Laodicea. Disgusting water. And Jesus taps into this.

[4 : 42] Pun intended, right? And he says, you guys are just like your water. I taste you and honestly I just want to be sick. And we've got to ask ourselves why.

Because that is not the Jesus that we get in the stained glass windows in churches around the country, is it? It's not the Jesus of popular culture. So we have to understand what is going on here. Here's what's happening. Here's the heart of it. Life in Laodicea, right? The water might be mingling. But life is happening. Okay?

It's a banking center. So people are wealthy in Laodicea. It's a medical center. With a particular speciality.

People used to come from the regions around to Laodicea. Because it's famous for producing salve for the eyes. Right? To heal and to help people's sight. And it's a textile center.

[5 : 40] So it's famous for producing black wool. I don't know if you want to think about kind of Scotland famous for producing what? Kashmir. Right? The same kind of thing goes on in Laodicea. So people are well dressed.

People look the part in Laodicea. So you take those things together and life is pretty cushy in Laodicea. In fact, life's so cushy. And I love this, learning this this week.

That an earthquake once destroyed this city. Rome offers to help give them money. And these guys say, do you know what? We don't need your money. We don't need your tools.

We don't need your resources. Because we can do this one by ourselves. And they did it by themselves. And so if you're a Laodicean, you pride yourself on the fact that you are independent and self-sufficient.

And what seems to have happened is that those same values that the people of the city love, independent self-sufficiency, right?

[6 : 39] No political connotations, just independent self-sufficiency. These things have infiltrated and seeped into the lives of this church. And instead of reflecting the glory of God, also passing worth of Jesus to the world, what's happening is these people are just reflecting the world to the world.

Okay? It's so often what, I don't know if I find my non-Christian friends, they would think. Right? You guys are just like us. Except you like to meet up on a Sunday and sing kumbaya.

Okay? What do they have in their minds? They have the Vicar of Deby in their minds. So you're just like us. And it seems that this church is just like their city. Just like the people of their city. Chasing the same things.

Same dreams. Same ambitions. Independent. Self-sufficient. And Jesus hates it. Because these people think deep down that they don't.

Need him. Right? If you asked them, they would have said, do you know what? We've got this church thing sorted. Right? We've got money in the bank. We've got people with skills.

[7 : 49] We've got a slick running service. We checked our website. We've got this church thing sorted. And Jesus hates it. He hates it. And so as we eavesdrop in on this loving rebuke that Jesus makes to these Christians.

The self-reflective question that comes squarely to us, I think, individually, but more so corporately, is to assess whether deep down we too don't think we really need Jesus.

That we rate our abilities to do things without him. And we certainly, as we're thinking about tonight, as we think about the future, yeah, we can do these things without him.

You know, if you phone the AA, pick up the phone and the person on the other end of the line will say, welcome to the fourth emergency service. Right?

You heard that one before? You're looking for your car insurance, home insurance? Car insurance. Welcome to the fourth emergency service. How often, friends, that we view Jesus as if he's simply the fifth.

[9 : 01] Right? Right? He's like a useful tag team member who we can kind of call upon if we've gone a few rounds. We're running out of energy. Right? He's a great sub. He's the only goner so

shower of the religious world that we know we can bring on if we need a last minute winner.

Well, this morning, Jesus is going to challenge us to recapture a sense of just how much we need him. And we'll see just how great and glorious he is.

And we will revel in the fact that he loves us. He loves us. So here's, we need to see just two headings if you're into headings.

Right? Here's two things that we need to see Jesus is doing here. Okay? The first thing he is doing is he is calling out complacent Christianity. Okay? Calling out complacent Christianity.

Now, if you come with me to verse 17. Here's what Jesus knows the folks in this church are saying. Right? Verse 17. Come with me. It's crucial that we see this. Here's what they're saying.

[10:04] Right? They're not probably walking around saying this stuff like, nice to meet you. My name's Norman. And I am these things. They're not saying these things out loud. Right? Probably the worrying thing, the challenging thing for us is I imagine they're doing every kind of thing that we do.

They go to church. They sing. They read. But here's what they think deep down. Here is the mantra in their hearts. Here's the thing that they say. The mental pep talk they give themselves every day.

As they look in the mirror as they are about to head out the door for work.

Do you see it? You say, I am rich. I have acquired wealth. And do not need a thing. Now, that's straight off the Oprah Winfrey show that one, isn't it?

That is some serious, positive mental attitude. And the thing I think, and this is what I was challenged on to see this week, is that we can have a right good laugh at these guys.

But the thing to see is, I know this is true in my life, that this is the default attitude of my heart. This is where I drift. I don't drift into dependence on God.

[11:08] I drift away to independence on me. Right? Particularly when we live in a culture like this. I turn on the news in the morning, and there's Richard Branson. And I think to myself, man, there's a self-made man.

He's done it. He's done it. I turn on the news, and there's Gary Barlow. If you check this out on BBC News later, he's talking about how he wrote three of his greatest hits for Take That in the one week. And I think, what a productive week that guy had. What am I going to do with my week? What am I going to achieve today? I've got the mental resolve to do it today. I've got the resources to progress my life today.

Let's go and attack it today. And I'm out that door. And I'm thinking, I've got this one sussed.

Friends, if you want to trace the crack on the ceiling of our hearts all the way back.

To its source. You can trace it all the way back to the Garden of Eden, can't you? God, we don't need you. We can do this on our own.

[12:07] We've got this. You're an inconvenience. You're in the way. Just, we can do this. But here's what Jesus sees back in the text. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

Right? Do you see what he's doing there? He's picked his words brilliantly. To the people living in the banking center, he says what? He says, you are poor. To the people living in the medical center, specializing in the eyes.

What does he say? He says, you are blind. To the people living in the textile center, he says, you are naked. We've got to understand that this isn't Jesus adopting some kind of tall poppy syndrome. Right? This isn't tabloid Jesus seeking to kind of expose people in an attempt to cut them down to size in case they get any ideas above their stations.

This is Jesus inviting them to adopt the mindset of his counterintuitive kingdom.

[13:16] For those who exalt themselves will be humbled. And those who humble themselves will be exalted. Where the first will be last.

And where the last will be first. Where weakness is the new strength. Where dying to self is the way to life. This is the cross-shaped pattern of the kingdom.

And it sounds like utter foolishness to the world. Why would you even entertain thoughts like this? But, says Jesus, this is exactly the place.

And this is exactly the posture where you will find eternal life. As you come to savor the gospel of God's free grace.

As you come to rest in the Jesus who loved us and who gave himself for us. And as you come to know Jesus as our all in all.

[14:27] You know, when Alex and I, before we started here, spent a bit of time in Malawi. Lovely country. Lord willing, we'd love to go back there one day.

Two of our best friends when we were out there were called Helen's Stew. Right? Helen's Stew, they live in Oban now. They were Scottish as well. So we kind of connected over that Scotland thing. Remember we went for a walk one day.

And we're having a chat about things that we will love when we go home. Right? The things that we miss about home. It's what you do when you go abroad, isn't it? You find somebody from your own country.

You talk about the things that you miss. So I'm talking about the things that I'm looking forward to when I go back. And I'm talking about McDonald's. I'm talking about power showers. Right? I'm talking about match of the day.

And I say, what do you miss? What are you going to love? You've been out here longer than us. What are you going to love when you go home? Expected to kind of hear similar answers. Right?

[15:24] And do you know what she said? She said, I'm actually dreading going home. Because back home, do you know what? I never prayed. But out here, I've learned what it is to ask the Lord for my daily bread.

Right? Where are we going to get petrol from? There was a huge petrol shortage when we were out there. How are we going to make ends meet? You know, our sponsors abroad, as they support us, as kind of mission workers.

What are we going to do? How do I mentally cope in a culture that is so different from the one that I'm used to? Thinking about the little girl that they had. What happens when she gets sick and we're not in a country where we have free access to health care?

And all of a sudden, friends, she said, you know, that quarter pounder that was in my mind didn't sound so appealing. How often we let our relative affluence cloud our understanding for just how much we need Jesus.

Do we see how much we need him? He is calling out complacent Christianity.

[16:37] And the second thing he is doing is he is calling for dependent disciples. He loves them too much. Loves them too much to let them stay in this place, this whole existence of a religious life.

He wants them to know life to the full. But he ain't going to find it doing what they're doing, living how they're living. They're going to find it in him. Right? That's what's driving all of this. His love for his people.

Do you see that in verse 19? The promise of Jesus that those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. Okay? So like a loving parent there, Jesus is saying, son, daughter, don't roam over there.

Don't go there. It's not good for you to be there. It's not good for you to think like that. And what we need to see, he's not lost the plot here. He's not like a neighbor standing in the middle of the street. Lost it, shouting. Get your act together. What are you doing? He's not sitting there disappointed in their failings. He's not angry at their folly. Friends, how often that is the Jesus that we have in our minds when we fail.

[17:45] To see where he is. Where is he? And we need to see this. Where is he? Verse 20. Come with me. Verse 20. He is at the door knocking. He is pursuing them.

And he's offering them. Not stuff. Right? Guys don't need stuff. He's offering them himself, which is so much greater.

And that's why he reminds them, I think, of who he is at verse 14. This is who I am. This is who I am. Do you see it? He doesn't offer an amen. He calls himself the amen.

Okay? He is the yes. As Paul would write in 2 Corinthians, the yes to all of God's promises down the ages. He is the faithful one. He is the one who will not change.

In your world, it changes all the time. He is the one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the one who holds all creation together by the power of his word.

[18:46] He is the one who holds the future. And he is the one who holds these Christians in his hand. And he invites them, verse 18, to come and buy from me.

It's just a deliberate echo of the Isaiah 55 passage that we read earlier, where God offers his people, right? His rebellious people. He offers them. It's almost like the finest cuts of life.

Right? And you say, well, how much does that cost? What do I need to save? Right? That little girl, Chloe, she's into saving pennies at the minute. Right? How much does this cost?

How much do we need to buy stuff from our creator? The answer is this is without payment. This is without price. And look what Jesus is offering here. Gold refined in the fire.

So you can become rich. And white clothes to wear. So you can cover your shameful nakedness. And salve to put on your eyes. So you can see. This is an invitation to come and taste and see that the Lord is good.

[19 : 50] This is an invitation to come and know the transforming power of his free grace. It's free. It's lavish. Why? Because he paid the price. He paid the price.

Went for a coffee with somebody the other day. And they used that phrase that we use all the time. This one's on me. Okay? Very nice. This one's on me. Grace, friends, is on him.

It's on him. He picked up the tab. He paid the price for our sin on the cross. He took it on himself. And so he extends life, the invitation of life, to all those who would come and trust in him.

He says, come and see that in me are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that in me are redemption and forgiveness for your every single failing and faults.

And come and find that in me your eyes can be opened so that you can clearly see and walk in the light of life. You know, my favorite hymn, favorite hymn.

[20 : 53] I heard the voice of Jesus say. If you're not listening to it, go and check it out when you get home. Audrey Asad has got a great version of it. I heard the voice of Jesus say, Behold, I freely give.

The living water, thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live. I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream. Oh, my thirst was quenched.

My soul revived. And now I live in him. This is what's an offer. In verse 20, do you see, he promises to all those who would open the door and humble themselves that he will come and eat with them.

I love that thought. Love that thought. Do you know why? Because sharing a meal with Jesus.

Okay, and of course, to share a meal with someone in this day speaks of association.

Speaks of kind of affirmation. Speaks of affection. Speaks of worth. That's why you can make a great case that in Luke's gospel, Jesus gets killed because he eats with the wrong people. Okay?

[21 : 58] But this is what Jesus is offering here. This is a deeply relational invitation. I will come and eat with you. Right? To know life with this three-in-one God and to share in his victory.

Right? Here is Jesus, friends. Here he is. And he's doing two things. He's calling out complacent Christianity. And he's calling for dependent disciples.

Right? And so as we bring this together, these two things together, how is this dependence going to express ourselves in our daily lives? So I was asking myself all week, right?

How can we help ourselves every day see and stop and listen and know our need for Jesus? How can we help ourselves see it?

Maybe it was something you want to think about as you go about your day to day. You know, it's often said that William Wilberforce, what he did every day is he put a small stone in his shoe. And what would happen is that at random points throughout the day, that stone would kind of dig into his foot.

[23 : 04] Right? You know that feeling, how annoying that is. But he did this deliberately. And apparently every time it happened, it humbled him. Right? Because he mixed him with some big wigs. Okay? Humbled him.

But also it just reminded him of his need to pray. You know, what we've tried to do recently and I found this so helpful is we just bought a sticker for our house.

Right? And we stuck it right next to the front door. And it just says, quoting the words from the Philippians, Paul Philippians, Give thanks in all circumstances. Pray without ceasing.

Every day when I'm about to go out the door, I see it. And every day I look at it and I'm reminded, Graham, you are not Superman today. You are not the saviour of the world today because that role is taken.

You are tired. You are weary. You do not have the answers today. You do not know what is going to happen today. That is exactly what life has taught us over this last year. You do not have a clue what's going to happen. But you know what?

[24 : 00] You're lacking in wisdom. You're lacking in knowledge. Jesus isn't. Jesus isn't. Friends, we have a great need of Jesus.

But let's rejoice that we have a great Jesus for our need. You know, just as we bring this to a close, if proud self-sufficiency in the heart is the kind of taste that makes Jesus sick, let's flip it around and

ask, what is the taste that makes him delighted?

Right? It seems to me as you read the Gospels, and there's tons of places we could have gone here, right? But it seems to me as you read the Gospels that Jesus has some of his greatest words of affirmation for this man called John the Baptist.

Okay? And when you read it, you know, there is none born of woman greater than John the Baptist.

Right? And it's to do with his role in salvation history. He's the one that comes before Jesus.

He's the forerunner that's getting the ground ready. But I'm sure wrapped up in that as well is the confession that we get of John the Baptist and John. Right? Where he says, I must decrease and he must increase.

[25 : 13] I must decrease, he must increase. You know, just as we close, there was a song I was listening to in the car on the way here. It was a song written a number of years ago by a man named Matt Redmond.

And the story behind it came out of this church that he's part of down in Watford. Right? That moment in time, the too many things had gotten in the way. The people in this church up the front are too obsessed with how things were looking.

Too worried about how they were performing. And they were almost competing for who was doing what. And somebody at one point in time just stopped and pointed out and asked the question. And they said, just where is Jesus in all of this?

Where is Jesus in all of this? And out of this moment, as the church together, they stopped and they saw it. And they fell on their knees and they repented.

And they threw themselves upon Jesus once again. Out of this moment was birthed this song, The Heart of Worship. And let me just close with these words, friends.

[26 : 17] And maybe you can just resonate wherever you are right now with these words. King of endless worth, no one could express how much you deserve.

Though I'm weak and poor, all I have is yours every single breath. I'm coming back to the heart of worship and it's all about you. It's all about you, Jesus.

I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it. When it's all about you, it's all about you, Jesus. Friends, let's pray.

And so, Heavenly Father, in the silence now, Lord, I just ask that you're, the truth of your gospel, the truth of who you are, Father, who sent his Son for us, and the truth of your Spirit now living in us as your people, Father, would you help us just recapture a sense of who we are and a glorious sense of who you are.

So, Father, I pray for us here who are here this morning. I pray for those perhaps who are watching, whose hearts are away from you. Lord, I pray that you would help us understand that your Son, Jesus, is at the door knocking.

[27 : 45] And he is the one full of grace and truth. Oh, Father, would you just rid us of our self-sufficiency and instill in us that utter sense of dependency and in us that heart that knows the all-surpassing worth of Jesus.

Father, thank you that you love us. This passage screams that at us. Thank you that you love us.

And thank you that you hear us because we pray in Jesus' worthy and in his wonderful name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.