

Driven by God's Love

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you so much, Rebecca. Folks, I'm conscious we've been sitting for a while, so will we stand and will we pray? And we'll ask God as we come to his word today that he would speak and change us.

Why don't we stand? And Heavenly Father, it's our prayer now that you would help us to gaze upon your greatness this morning as we turn to your precious word.

Thank you that we've heard already in this service that you are a God who longs and loves to give life to dead things. Father, thank you that we are here today simply because of your grace. Help us now as we turn to your word.

Change us, transform us, convict us, send us out with the good news of Christ, we pray. In his precious name, amen. Amen. Folks, let me tell you about a guy called Ronnie O'Sullivan.

Does that name mean anything to anyone? Ronnie O'Sullivan? Rocket Ronnie? Ronnie, arguably, and if you disagree, you disagree, arguably the greatest snooker player of all time.

[1 : 0 6] And I listened to him this week give an interview to BBC Sport about how he was coming up to 30 years in the game. So he started, can you believe this?

He went pro at 16, Rocket Ronnie, 16. And now 30 years later, this interview was designed to get him to talk about how he's feeling about the sport where arguably he's hit the top.

And what he said, and he said this, and his body language hid nothing. He said this, he had his chin in his hands. And he talked about how the fact that the game that he loved, he used to love, now mentally he's checked out.

He checked out about eight years ago, actually. And he's just bored of it. And now what it is, it's a game where he just turns up, he does his thing. In his description, you can watch it online, he pots a few balls, he gets paid, and he goes home.

And something that used to fire him up, now actually is just a thing that he does. And I listened to this man, and my heart broke from him.

[2 : 1 1] Imagine the thing that your life's supposed to be all about. And actually it's just, you're settling for a cold, monotonous, mechanical existence. But if we're honest, how true is that often of our Christian lives?

That something that used to be so exciting for us, something that used to get us going, actually now the fire in our hearts has well and truly gone out. Oh friends, how easy is it to settle for that kind of life?

And if that's you here today, here's the glorious passage of this, the glorious invitation of this sermon into this passage. is come and be wonderfully reminded of why we exist as a local church.

As we look and gaze at our great God, as we think about who he is, as we take him in, and as we think about why he does what he does.

Now if you come with me to the passage, verse 16. Friends, do you see what the wonderful first word is? The first word is for.

[3 : 22] Okay, do you see it? It's a bridging word. It's a bridging word that connects everything that John is about to say with everything that has just come before. Now that's a bang on cry, okay, because what was Jesus talking about before?

He was talking about the cries of babies, wasn't he? He was talking about new life. He was explaining to this man, Nicodemus, he was saying that you must be born again. You need God to do a work of transformation in your life so for you to understand and enter the kingdom of God.

So Nicodemus, the religious winner, right? Nicodemus, the moral victor. Nicodemus, Israel's finest. And here he is being told that he's spiritually dead inside.

The only thing that Nicodemus can do to enter the kingdom of God, and do you see it there at verse 15? The only thing that he can do is to look on the sun, suspended on the cross, look and live.

So verse 15, before we get into verse 16, verse 15 literally ends with Jesus telling Nicodemus to picture him on the cross, hands open.

[4 : 37] And this is the context of verse 16. And here's how I love thinking about it this week, and you can tell that I've just put in our car for a service, right? Here's what's going on.

John is acting like a car mechanic, right? What is he doing? He's saying, come over, come over. He pops the hood. He says, have a look inside.

Do you get that engine? Do you see it? Do you see what's powering this thing? Do you see what's making this thing go? Do you see what's giving this thing gas? Friend, would you come and see what is making this thing go?

John, in these verses, he pops the hood and he says, would you see what's making the gospel go? Would you come and savor what's motivating this God to do what he does? What's driving the Son of God to become, this is where this gospel is heading, to become the Lamb of God.

What is driving the Son of God to become the Lamb of God as he goes to the cross? What's driving this thing? What's under the engine? What's under the bonnet? Well, friends, it's the love of God.

[5 : 48] It's the love of God that's driving this thing. It's the love of God that's under the bonnet of John 3.16. Now, let's be honest, though. When I say God is love, I'm aware that that ain't controversial.

It's probably the safest thing that I think I could say from up here today, that God is love. Wonderfully true. You're here today, maybe that doesn't surprise you.

Even my atheist friends would presumptuously agree that if there is a God, then surely he should be loving. It's not controversial to say God is love. In the words of German poets, and I think I said this right, Heinrich Heine, he says, of course God will forgive me.

That's his job. Of course God will forgive me. That's his job. If there is a God, if he does exist, then he should be loving. It's not controversial to our world. It's not controversial to John's first Jewish audience either.

The Lord, the Lord, merciful and compassionate, showing steadfast love to generation after generation. The fact that God is love, ain't controversial. But why God is love?

[6 : 54] That's where things get a bit more interesting. Why is this God's love? Is he for the God of the Bible to love? Let me just allow, let's allow the text to stretch us a bit.

For him to love is not the result of a fuzzy notion that came over him. It is not the result of Cupid's arrows sinking into him.

Nor is it the effect of the teeth of the love bug getting into him. Why does this God love? It's because of who he is.

You see, the God we see revealed to us in the Bible is one God in three persons. And that makes him wonderfully and gloriously unique.

Outstandingly unique. Friends, our Hindu friends worship many gods. Our Muslim and Jewish friends, how we love them, they worship one God.

[7 : 59] But the God of the Bible, he is triune. He is one God in three persons. He is Father, he is Son, he is Spirit.

Now why does that matter? It matters because our God has existed for all eternity as a joyous community of Father, Son and Spirit who have been doing nothing other than loving and mutually delighting in one another.

So how can this God be love? It's because of who he is. He is three in one. Oh, and John wants us to see three wonderfully surprising ways that God's love is unlike anything that we have ever known.

Oh, let's rattle through these, will we? And gloriously savor them. God's love is global, not local. Do you see it in the text there? Verse 16. It doesn't stop at Israel's borders.

There is no boundary marker. Remember, this God loves the world. And what makes that even more incredible is that the last time John mentioned the world back at verse 10 of chapter 1, he was talking about a world that rejects God, that wanted nothing to do with this God and the coming of his Son, the coming of light into the world.

[9 : 30] This is the world that are triune God loves. You see, the reference there to world is not so much a reference to its bigness, it's a reference to its badness.

John's readers immediately think pagan Gentiles despise Samaritans, idolatrous Romans, and of course, this gospel from now on is going to be full of people just like that coming to have faith in the Son.

This is the extent of God's love, that he loves his enemies. I find that really challenging because, you know what, I find it really easy to love people who are just like me, who look just like me, who sound just like me, who think just like me, who laugh at the same things just like me, who act just like me, but when somebody doesn't tick those boxes, that's when I find it to be a little bit more tricky.

And that's why one of the buzzwords of our generation today is what? It's tolerance. Because our world is telling us to tolerate people not like us.

So desperate are we to find solutions to the fractures that exist between the relationships between human beings in this world. But do you see how this God will not settle for tolerance?

[10 : 52] He loves the world. His love is entirely different to human beings' love.

His love is one that pursues his enemies. And that's because all sorts of connotations, doesn't it, for how we are to be as the family of God in this place. We don't have time to go into that, but you can think about those things.

It's a global love, friends. It's not a local love. And it's a giving love, not a demanding love. Such is the overflowing love of this God. So great is his heart for the world that it spills over into giving.

This God is not lacking in anything. This God did not create the world because he is lonely. He created the world that gives life to things because it's who he is. He is a giver. He's a giver.

And it's his delight to give. Do you see what he gave? In the text, he gave his only son. Now let me ask you, what's the most precious thing that you own?

[11 : 57] I'm often asked that when I'm filling in my yearly insurance forms for our house. General insurance, but they say, are there any special items that you want to cover? In other words, what are the things you really care about?

Right? What's precious to you? What would you, your life almost wouldn't be worth living if it wasn't there? What would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, what would you, this God, you see, this father, his son for all eternity has been the apple of his eye.

The son has been the source of the father's delight for all eternity. The son is the most precious thing to God the father. And so great was his love for the world that he said is worth sending and giving him.

I'm assuming there was all sorts of other things that God could have given us but he gave us his son. And the son in glorious harmony responded and said, father, I'm willing to go.

Not to win God's love for us, not to, to change the mind of a reluctant father, not to negotiate a peace deal with him. We need to be clear on that. But out of an overflow of the loving heart of this God because of who he is.

[13 : 28] His heart that none would perish from a world that rejected him. And it's worth us wrestling with that word perish. It's talking about the eventual human predicament that's facing every single one of us outwith salvation in Jesus Christ.

I often think about it like fresh flowers. We often get fresh flowers in our home making the place smell and look fresh. When we buy them they look full of life but do you know what, six, seven, eight days later the things are in the bin.

Now when did those flowers die? They died the minute that they were cut off from their life source. See when the Bible talks about perishing it's talking about the natural direction and destination of human beings because our sin has cut us off from the God who made us.

And we die physically in our bodies but not just physically we need to understand spiritually as well verse 18 the condemnation of God that guilty verdict in his sight the one that will see us justly and eternally and rightly punished because he is a holy God because of our willing rejection of him friends that is hanging around our necks outwith of Christ.

Jesus in the gospels friends he talks about hell more than any other subject. You've got to understand he talks about it not with a smirk in his face. He talks about it with compassion in his heart.

[15 : 11] Do you feel the weight of that verse that none would perish condemnation because John says in verse 18 we have chosen that condemnation but Christ and this is the gospel Christ has come to become our condemnation.

He has come to absorb the penalty on himself that we deserved on the cross. He has come to be sin for us and this perishing that we deserve by nature friends if your faith is in Christ we know that he has taken that for us because that's the third thing we see about this God's love it's a saving love not a condemning love.

The coming of Jesus into the world if you think about it could have been terrible news could it not? It could have been awful news for us like the arrival of some kind of divine Ofsted inspector come to point the accusatory finger come to check every nook and cranny looking for something to hold us up for but Christ came to save the world.

No wonder John 3 16 and 17 have often been called the gospel in a nutshell. Friends that God would love a world that hated him is gracious that God would send his only son is unfathomable that God would want to save a judgment incurring and hell deserving world is utterly breathtaking.

Do you see how this God is so much better and so much more glorious than I think we ever stop to consider at times? Friends what do we do with this?

[16 : 56] Here's two things. Really simply we inhale it and we exhale it. If you're a Christian here today take stock on friends let your hearts be strengthened that it was the pursuing love of this God that sought and saved you.

Is that a marvelous thought? Is that not a heart warming heartbreaking thought? Friends your faith here today as unspectacular as you might think it is.

We always need to be thinking spiritually heavenly realities. What does the Bible say? That faith is no small thing. As weak as you feel you are as difficult as life is know that God has moved heaven and earth.

He's given the most precious thing to save you. Your name was in the heart of this God in eternity past. There was a moment in time when the Holy Spirit opened your eyes to the truth of who Jesus is at that moment your life became united to Jesus and that's who you are.

And more than that through the work of Christ the Bible would talk about the same love of God being poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

[18 : 22] And that's who you are today. If your faith is in Christ this is who you are. It's why our friends I need the word of God do you know why? Because it tells me things that are true about me that I just don't think I would believe otherwise.

God allow the scriptures to tell us things about us who we are. You know our little girl Grace one of her favorite toys and this is why I need to get this home today okay I asked her I could take it is this Russian doll.

Familiar with the concept Russian dolls? Somebody explained to me recently I read it recently I can't remember where that our lives as Christians are like Russian dolls. Imagine the three Russian dolls and think about yourself friends if you're a Christian as the middle one.

I would open this but it's going to get fiddly okay. Oh friends what does the scriptures tell us? By the indwelling Holy Spirit where is Christ? Christ is in us.

Right? Imagine the wee Russian doll in the middle one. Right? Christ is in us but what does the scriptures also say is true about us? Where are our lives caught up with whom they are in Christ?

[19 : 34] Okay? Do you see? Christ in us, us in Christ. That is who we are today. That is who we are. It's incredible isn't it when you think about it?

The pursuing love of God to find us and tell us things that are true about us. Oh friends Melissa Kruger in her wonderful little book Identity Theft and come and steal my copy if you want you can have it okay?

It's a wonderful book written by different female authors in the States. A devotional book which helps us understand who we are in Christ. She writes this, this God has made you his own and it brings him glory praise and joy.

Let the truth of God's word heal the wounds and replace the doubt and fear with the deep joy of unfathomable and unfailing love.

This is who you are today. Well friends we need to inhale this passage and then what do we need to do? We need to exhale it because the direction of the love of this God is by very nature because of who he is.

[20 : 47] It is outward. this God longs that perishing people would have life by knowing him and by having faith in his son.

And we cannot read John 3 16 and 17 and be unmoved by the plight of a world that is perishing in sin. Oh friends who are you rubbing shoulders with tomorrow morning as you go about your life?

Who is it that you are prayerfully burdened for? Who are you praying for? Do you know I was challenged by this week oh friends and I hope this stirs us as a church to be a place where people are prayed for that they would come to know Christ.

I would challenge this week by somebody who asked me if the Lord answered all my prayers for those friends of mine to become Christians how many would be converted? Oh friends are we burdened for a world that does not know Christ and is perishing?

Are our evangelistic antennae up? You know Alex and I have got some good friends called Hamish and Mariah they live in a housing estate with their three kids up in St. Andrews.

[22 : 09] Do you know what they do every Halloween? They go out to the front of their house they make a big bowl of chocolate and they serve it to their friends and their kids as they come by trying to serve them on a cold winter's night up there and they just hope to strike up gospel conversations.

Just something so simple and yet how profoundly reflective of this heart of God that evangelistically they are on the front foot and looking outward.

Oh friends we inhale this love and we exhale this love. The light and love of God has shone. And how will the world respond?

You see the two telling reactions. Here's one of them verse 19 and we have to see the strength of the language here. It's not that people just preferred the darkness.

It's that people hated the light. People love the darkness and we've got to understand again that this is all of us out with the work of the spirit in our lives.

[23 : 27] We are like cold-blooded animals that hate the light that when they see it just want to get to the darkness. We loathe seeing the light.

Why? Because we are afraid of having our dirt exposed. It's always the case, isn't it, when you think that your windows in your house are clean, especially this time of year, isn't it, or your car windscreen.

What is it that exposes the dirt? It's the light. You realize your windows are filthy. And why are we so reluctant to deal with the light?

Well, because it means that we need to change. We need to give up those evil deeds that we love. Do you see? Friends, one reaction to the light dawning is to continue to hate and hide.

It's what humanity has been doing ever since Genesis 3. Adam and Eve, what are they doing after they sin? They are what from God?

[24 : 32] They're hiding from God. God says, where are you? It's not like he doesn't know. They are hiding from God. They have believed the devil's lie.

Did God really say, can God really be trusted that this fruit here is not good for you? Because if you do it, you'll die. Can this God really be trusted? And they take the bait and their eyes are opened.

And this is what sin always does. It promises us what? Life and freedom. what's the first thing they realize? That they're naked? And what accompanies that?

Shame. And this is what humanity has been doing ever since Genesis 3, believing the devil's lie that safety and freedom is to be found by continuing to live in the darkness rather than coming to the light.

But it's not true. Friends, whatever's going on in your life today, know that the life is not to be found in the darkness. But know that life is to be found in the light.

[25 : 40] And that's what light does, doesn't it? It's what light does when it shines on mildew. Kills it. Because the other reaction to the light, however, is to step in and live.

And this is verse 21. In stark contrast to those who run to the darkness, and who continue to hate the light by rejecting Christ, there will also be those who God will open their eyes and they will respond to the truth.

And they will step into the light and be changed. And friends, we need to understand that when we do that, when we come into the light, what we will find there is not Jesus the school teacher.

it is Jesus full of grace and truth. It doesn't mean there are no consequences for our sin, but it does mean that if you need to confess something today, friends, stop believing the lie that life will be found in the darkness, continuing to hide and to run.

Come into the light and know that there is forgiveness and grace abounding in Christ. Christ. And this gospel is full of people who come to Jesus and should be condemned.

[26 : 56] We're going to meet them over the next number of weeks who should be condemned, but who instead come to him and find forgiveness and life in his name. So where are you this morning?

What's going on in your lives? Well, friends, do you see how life is to be found in the light? And their lives testify to the fact that God has done that.

It's a wonderful way, isn't it, to think about our good works, the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do. Friends, what are they testifying to? They're testifying to the fact that God has shone his light in our hearts.

Let me just say, and I know some of you here today, it's particularly hard just now as you live your life for Christ in the places that you are, school, at university, at work, these places, friends.

Let me just say two things. When we live our lives in the darkness as people of light, the world will recognize it and God loves it.

[27 : 58] So be strengthened. The life is to be found in the light. Now what does that testify to? It testifies to the pursuing love of God.

As we close, let me just take you to a little place called Widcom. our friends, Widcom is a community just south of Bath. And when we go down south to visit Alex's folks, we often go to church in this place called Widcom.

And I never realized this until last time we went down, but this church is known in its community as the church with writing on the roof. So it's a classic four corners of the roof, but it's known as the church that's got writing on the roof because Bath is so hilly, you think our city is hilly, Bath is so incredibly hilly that from wherever you are in the city you can kind of see this roof.

Surrounding neighbors, they can see this roof. And it's a way of them saying to this community, this is what we want you to know, and this is what we're all about, and this church has been here for centuries.

This is what this people of God in this place as they meet will always be about and reach out to you with. Do you know what it says? Here's what it says. On one side it says, one's blank, three sides, one says, prepare to meet thy God.

[29 : 24] The next side it says, you must be born again. And around the corner it says, Christ died for our sins. Friends, this is why we exist as a local church.

This love of God has been poured into our hearts, and this is why we here today, this is why we exist as a local church. But this is why we exist as a local church because this is the message that we're holding out to a lost and perishing world.

That God three in one so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Friends, how easy is it to become bored with the thing that life is supposed to be all about? How easy is it for us to let our passion for Jesus and our busyness as a church distract us from the thing that is meant to be the engine that revs us and gets us going, the love of God.

Do you see what's going on here? John is saying, come and see what's going on under the bonnet. Come and see the pursuing and beating love of God for a lost world, and come into the light.

[30 : 39] So here's what I want to do. We're going to pray. Maybe the band guys could come back up. And we're going to pray. We're going to sing two songs to the close that are just going to help us think about the things that we've been reflecting on today.

But as we pray, there's two particularly people that I've been burdened by this week as we've been thinking about this. And one, friends, if you are here and you've not put your faith in Jesus yet, today's the day.

Okay? Today's the day. Let's just say carpe diem. Today's the day. Because life is short. There was a girl who went past our house on a bike this week, knocked over, went to a hostel, don't know what happened. Life is short.

Today's the day. Okay? Today's the day. This prayer is for you. Pray this in your heart. Okay? Today's the day. The next person is those who believe that the Father doesn't love them.

I don't know what's going on in your heart. You don't believe the Father loves you. Come to this and see that he does. This is who this God is and this is how he's loved you. Friends, respond this morning as we sing these last two songs.

[31 : 49] Respond in your heart and worship him in a coming of life in his name. So we're going to pray and then we're going to sing and I was going to come and close and we're going to go and eat.

Okay? But friends, don't leave this building this morning and they haven't done business with this God. So let's pray, will we? Our Father, we just thank you, Lord, for who you are this morning.

We would never have come up with a God like this. How great and how good you are and how wonderful is the news of your pursuing love.

Father, none of us sit here today having earned your love. Oh, friends, oh, Father, but we sit here today as those who've been wonderful recipients of your love.

So, Father, for those here today who do not know you and have trusted in the work of your Son on the cross, may today be the day. Oh, Father, be at work by your Spirit, we pray.

[32 : 53] And, Lord, for those for whom are perhaps doubting your love for them. Lord, circumstances, things going on in life that would rob us of that joy of knowing Jesus.

Oh, Lord, may again today be the day, Father, will you reassure us of your fatherly love and care for us in Christ. This is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Oh, Father, be with us as we finish our time together this morning. Be in the conversations around coffee. Be amongst us as we eat together. Oh, Father, be ministering amongst us by your Spirit, we pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen.