

How great is the love of the Father

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn to the passage that we read in 1 John chapter 3. We're taking a little break today from the series that we've been developing or going through these past few weeks, or in one case months. So, this morning we took a wee break from Mark's gospel, and this evening we're going to take a wee break from the festivals of the Old Testament. We'll return to that and complete the series of festivals that there is to consider. But this evening I want to just pick up on a theme in a sense that we were considering this morning, but to look at it from the perspective of this passage in the New Testament. This morning we were thinking about King David and how David was overwhelmed by the grace and generosity of God, and that really is our great and pressing need to be overwhelmed by God, to be captivated by His grace and generosity. This is a starting point not only for Christian giving, which is what we were considering this morning, but for Christian living in the much broader sense of that word, and we'll notice that this evening in due course. So, I want to continue then to think of this theme, but with the passage that we read a few moments ago, where we find John, who writes this letter, in awestruck wonder as he contemplates and considers the love of the Father. These very well-known words with which he gives expression to this awe that he senses. And there in the first verse of chapter 3, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God.

I want to think about these words and, in a way, play with the words that we find there in verse 1, where it begins, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us. And there, of course, the words, how great are being used as a form of superlative to emphasize the magnitude of this love. How great is the love the Father has for us? But if we play around with the words a little bit and convert those words into a question, that question will serve as our starting point. And so, the question is, how great is the Father's love? And we want to answer that question in the light of what John has to say in these verses. And the ways in which we'll answer the question is to focus on different aspects of the greatness of the Father's love. We'll notice how the Father's love is great in its condescension. We'll explain a little what we mean by that in a moment. But also great in its extravagance, great in its expression, great in its purpose, its eternal purpose for us as believers, and great also in its power to transform us in the present. So, let's go along these different avenues in answering this question. How great is the Father's love? So, the first thing that I'm suggesting as we turn to the passages is that it is great in its condescension. We'll take a wee moment to get to what we mean by that particular word. The evidence of the Father's love is identified by John by one striking reality, namely that we are called children of God. Then he states that very clearly in verse 1 of chapter 3, how great is the love of the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. So, the evidence of the love of the Father is to be found in this objective reality that we believers are called sons or children of God. And it's not, of course, just that we're called children of God. We are so called because we are children of God, sons and daughters of God. You can almost sense in the language of John and the way he orders his thoughts, you can almost sense his sense of wonder and almost disbelief when he affirms, and this is what we are. It's almost as if he could have introduced that with amazing though it is, remarkable though it may seem, difficult to comprehend though it is. This is the reality. This is what we are. We are children of God.

Just curiously tying in, I suppose, a little with this sense of amazement that John evidences in what he has to say. I was watching this afternoon, I just saw on my timeline on Facebook, a clip. And the clip, it was maybe about five minutes long. And it concerned, I suppose, what you would call a social experiment where folks of different nationalities and ethnicities were interviewed concerning their own sense of ethnic or national identity. And there was a panel of three people and then they would interview the folks one by one. So the first guy was an English guy and he would say, oh, I'm English, my parents are English, and that's who I am. I wouldn't want to be anything else. And then they asked him, is there any nationality that you're not too keen on? And he was obviously a little bit nervous about being honest. And he said, well, I'm not too keen on the Germans. Oh, well, fair enough. Then they interviewed, there was a Kurdish lady. And oh, she was also very proud of her Kurdish identity and expressed, in careful language, but nonetheless expressed her, what shall we say, lack of enthusiasm for Turks.

Well, you can understand that. But nonetheless, and they carried on. There was a French lady. Oh, she was very pleased to be French. And she assured us that she was 100% French. And so it'd go on. You get the idea.

So anyway, then they said to all those who were being interviewed or participating in this, they said, would you be willing to be part of an experiment? We want to take your DNA. And what we're going to do is we're going to examine your DNA to actually establish what is your ethnic identity. I'm not going to even try and explain how this works, because I'll probably get it wrong, but you probably do. The point is, with your DNA, you can work out, you know, going back generations, you know, where, you know, where it all comes together. The jigsaw, the, I suppose, the genealogical jigsaw that we, we all are. So they did this. And it was really quite entertaining when they then gave the results to these people. So they gave the results to the, to the English guy who would be very proud of the English, you know. And he had a look and he said, ooh, you look really quite shocked. Five percent German.

[7 : 56] I think he said, oh, okay. And then the, the, the poor Kurdish lady discovered she was like 30% Turkish, which was just a shocking discovery for her. The French lady discovered she was, I don't know what percentage, British. Well, she seemed quite intrigued and entertained by this.

But there was this sense of shock as they discovered their identity, as they discovered who they come from, who their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents are.

Really, yeah, very fascinating, if you can find it. I was trying to see if there was like a link or something, but I couldn't find any kind of link. So you can explore that if you want, find it, I'm sure, online. And I tell all this stories because I was struck by the, the, the sense, for some of them, the sense of amazement at discovering who they are. Now, in the case of, of John, there is also a sense of amazement at discovering who his father is. But in this case, not of disappointment, not of shock, not of horror, but of profound gratitude. This is who we are. This is our father. How great is the law of the father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God, and that is who we are.

He really is our father. It's amazing. It's incredible. You wouldn't think it possible, but it's true. God is our father. How can it be that the creator of the universe, the God of all glory and majesty and power should be the father of the likes of us, should adopt the likes of us to be his children? And the answer is, and this is where we come to the word that I introduced a few moments ago, the answer is that his love, the father's love, is great in its condescension. God comes down to our level, not just to rescue us from our sin, wonderful though that is, but he comes down to father us, to nurture us, to embrace us with a father's embrace and welcome us into his family, into the intimate circle of his family. And so in answer to the question, how great is the father's love? We can say this, that it is great in its condescension. He lovingly condescends to us. And in the most beautiful sense of that word, we tend to use that word in a negative way, but it isn't a word that is necessarily negative in its meaning or connotations, and certainly not on this occasion. But we can also answer the question, how great is the father's love? By identifying that it is great in its extravagance.

And the word really that jumps out at us from the passage that speaks of extravagance is this verb that John uses, how great is the love the father has lavished on us. Or in any case, the word that is employed in translating what John says, and I think captures the sense of what he's saying.

[11 : 05] How great is the love the father has lavished on us? And there's this extravagant language that is employing. But there's also a detail here that is missed as we read the passage in front of us in the church Bible. And it begins with that word, behold, and rightly so, because in what was written, there is that word that the NIV has chosen to simply put to one sign, look or behold. And what John is doing is he's saying, I really want you to have a look at this. I want you to stop and pause and consider this amazing reality. Look, behold, something amazing. You know, maybe sometimes when we see something remarkable and we want to capture somebody's attention, we'll say, look, look at that rainbow, or look at this item on the news. Somebody else's, they're in their, I don't know, their iPad or they're, you know, distracted.

Look, it's important. Look at this. And that's what John's doing here is, look, behold, just consider this amazing extravagant love. And as we consider this aspect of the father's love, its extravagance, we can do so by thinking of in two ways. First of all, considering the nature, the very nature of the father's love. In the words that we're employing really to kind of give us a hook on which to say what we have to say there at the beginning, how great is the love the father has lavished on us.

Those words translated, how great, translate a Greek word that can also be translated, what manner of, that's in the wee, I think, in the old version it has that, behold, what manner of love.

And that expression or the word that can be translated in these two different ways originally meant something along the lines of, of what country. And the idea is that it's a word that expresses surprise and wonder at something wholly unexpected. You know, sometimes we say, where did that come from?

And we say, where did that come from? Because it's something totally unexpected. It might be something somebody says, or it might be a circumstance that, that presents itself. And we say, where did that come from? I didn't see that coming. It's just totally unexpected. It's out of the blue.

[13 : 40] And John, when he uses this, this language of how great or what manner of, he's saying, this is something that is in a completely different category. It's not something we could have anticipated. It's not something we could, we can easily relate to something else. It is so different from anything else we could imagine. And he's identifying the Father's love as altogether different, in some regards, altogether unexpected. His love is in a different category to anything we have or ever will experience, however much we seek to and are encouraged to reflect his love in our own relationships. The same expression or the same word that is translated here, how great or could be translated what manner of, is actually used on another occasion, in some ways quite a different occasion, but it gives us an idea of the sense. In Matthew chapter 8 and verse 27, in Matthew chapter 8, we'll just quickly find that verse. And notice how this same word is used there. In Matthew chapter 8 and verse 27, the context is the calming of the storm. We know the occasion and the disciples are witnesses to this remarkable miracle performed by Jesus. And we read there, the men were amazed and asked, what kind of man is this? What manner of man is this? It's the same expression. And you can see that the connection. It's where did this come from? You know, we didn't see this coming. This is an authority and a power that is of a different category. It's beyond anything we've ever imagined or experienced.

And of course, John was there. John was one of the disciples who expressed himself in that way. What kind of man is this? And now the same disciple, decades later, when he's writing this letter, cries out in our pens, these words, what kind of love is this? What manner of love is this? How great is this love that the Father has lavished on us? That's the nature of the Father's love. It is altogether other, altogether different to anything we will find anywhere else. But the word lavish, lavish that kind of picks on or points us to this idea of extravagance, is also a word that speaks of our experience of the Father's love. And this is our experience as Christians of His love as He draws near to us, as He adopts us into His family, as He forgives our sins, as He deals gently and graciously with us.

A love that is extravagant, that is rich. Our Father so loves us in so many different ways. So in answer to the question, how great is the Father's love? We've answered it in the first way by saying that it's great in its condescension, great in its extravagance, but also great in its expression. And when I use the word expression, the idea is in the costly expression of His love to secure our status as His children. Now here we're stepping out of the immediate passage in a sense, because in our passage, or certainly in the verses that we've read, John simply declares that the Father's love is extravagant, that it's remarkable, that He's lavished it on us. He declares that we are children of God. But to appreciate the magnitude of this extravagant love, we need to appreciate the price the price the Father paid to secure our status as children of God. John takes all of that as a given on this occasion. Just to think a little bit about this idea of the cost involved, the price that is paid to secure being father of children. Now, I have three boys. For us as a family, it was a fairly straightforward matter to have children. Now, I say that as a man who didn't have to go through the pains of childbirth and all that, so forgive me. But, you know, in the grand scheme of things, it was fairly straightforward for us to have a family. But that's not true for everybody. I remember on one occasion in Peru, I was involved in helping a Dutch couple adopt a child. And it was quite remarkable, everything that they had to go through to finally become the parents of this child. They knew the child. They'd already identified the child who they were seeking to adopt. And in terms of the paperwork, the interviews they had to have, there were people trying to get bribes off them. And if they weren't willing to do that, it just got all more complicated, translating documents in different ways, paying different fees that needed to be paid, the time that it took, the delays. You know, somebody said, oh, well, come back next week. And I can't remember all the ins and outs. But it was really quite a remarkable investment in every way, not just financial, but in terms of emotional energy and time. And, you know, they were from Holland. They were, you know, spending several weeks in Peru trying to finally secure the paperwork that would formalize and establish them as the adoptive parents of this child. And you could almost, even in that alone, you could witness the great love that they had for this child, the huge effort that they were making in order to be able to be the parents of this child. Well, likewise, but in far greater measure, with our Father God, we can consider the huge price that He paid in order to secure our status as His children. Again, as I mentioned, John doesn't speak of that in these verses, but listen to what Paul says as he writes to the Christians in Galatia in chapter 4 and verses 4 and 5. He deals with this very matter. We read in those verses, but when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Particularly that last part of the verse.

It's speaking of what God did in order that we might become sons, in order that we might be called children of God. What did God have to do? Well, He had to send His Son. He had to send His only Son in order to secure our status as His children. He had to send Jesus to save us, to redeem us.

And we know that Jesus did this by dying on the cross in our place, by taking the penalty of our sin, and so making possible our adoption into the family of God. How great is the Father's love? Well, great in its expression, in the manner in which He secured our status as His children.

[21 : 11] But then, fourthly, and there's five ways that we're going to be looking at, but fourthly, we can say that the Father's love, or answering the question, how great is the Father's love, we can say that it's great in its eternal purpose. And I'm thinking especially of what we read there in verse 2. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

We are loved now. This love that is lavished on us is a present experience. It's a present reality. We are children now. John states that so dramatically. That is what we are. That is what we are now, in the present. But in verse 2, it's clear that John is recognizing that there is more to come.

God's love is great in its eternal purpose for us that is, in part, revealed there in that second verse. Now, there is an element of mystery here that John recognizes. He says, what we will be has not yet been made known. But though that is true, and we don't have the whole picture, not all has been revealed, yet we are not by any means in the dark. When He appears, we read, we shall be like Him.

And the He is going back to a reference to the Son, to Jesus, in previous verses. When Jesus appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. It's not that we'll no longer be children.

We will still be children. We will still be sons and daughters of God. But we will be perfect children, perfected children. We will be children conformed to the likeness of Jesus, to use the language that Paul uses in Romans chapter 8, conformed to the likeness of Jesus. Now we are on that journey. We are in lesser or greater measure approximating to that reality. But on that day, when we see Him face to face, we will be conformed to His likeness. The work has begun, but we'll be consummated on that future day when Jesus returns. And so, the love of the Father is great not only in the present reality that we acknowledge, that John acknowledges that we are children of God, but great also in its eternal purpose for us, that we look forward to with anticipation. But then finally, a final answer that we can give to the question, how great is the Father's love? And we can say this, that it is great in its present power to transform. So, a moment ago, we were looking to the future. We return now to the present and what is said by John in verse 3, everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure.

[24 : 18] The reality of God's love both challenges and empowers us to holy living in the present. Notice how the verse identifies that which we possess, a task that we are given, and also our ultimate example or aspiration. What is it that we possess? Well, we possess this hope.

Everyone who has this hope, this hope concerning this reality that will be ours as those who are children of God, loved by God. Those who possess this hope, we possess this hope. And those who possess this hope have a task to perform, and that is to putify ourselves. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies Himself. Now, that language may be great. It's a little the idea of us purifying ourselves.

Are we not always told, well, we can't do that. It's only God who can cleanse us. It's only God who can purify us. And we read that and we think, well, what's going on here? But surely here what we have is this healthy balance between a recognition, of course, that ultimately God alone can cleanse us, but also that healthy balance of recognizing that we who are Christians, we who have been cleansed, we who have been brought into the family of God, have a responsibility to make use of the means of grace that God provides to live holy, pure lives, to seek daily God's forgiveness, to seek daily God's help, to live holy lives, to shun sin, and to resist temptation, to leave behind those things that defile in our thinking and in our speaking and in our acting. This is our task. This is the task that we are given those who have this hope. And as we do so, we do so in the expectation and the aspiration that we will become like Him as the promise there is stated for us. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure, just as Jesus is pure. He doesn't have to purify Himself. He is pure, eternally pure, and He is our example. He is our aspiration. The greatness, goodness, and generosity of

God inspired King David, as we were seeing this morning, to joyful giving. The love of the Father inspires us to holy living. That is the logic of what John is saying here. Amazed by the love of God and then saying, well, given that this is so, how then shall we live? How then shall we conduct ourselves in this world in the present? So, the question was posed just a few moments ago, how great is the Father's love? Well, it is great in its condescension. It's great in its extravagance, great in its expression as that love secured our status as children of God, great in its eternal purpose, and great in its power.

To transform us in the present. Praise be to God for so great a love. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for what it speaks to us concerning Yourself. We thank You for Your love for us. We thank You that it is an eternal love. We thank You for the manner in which it found such glorious expression in the giving of Your Son Jesus to be our Savior. We pray that we would be those who take the time to look, to behold, to pause and consider, and to meditate on, to reflect on, to digest the reality and the implications of so great a love and the great privilege that is ours to be children of God, to be Your children. We pray that the evidence of our gratitude, the evidence of the wonder that is ours as we contemplate these realities, would be demonstrated in the lives that we live as we seek with Your help and in Your power to live holy lives that are ever more like Your Son,

[28 : 50] Jesus. And these things we pray in His name. Amen.