

This is my Beloved Son

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[0 : 00] Today I'd like us to turn back to Matthew chapter 17 and we can read again at verse 5.

He that is Peter was still speaking when behold a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

I am pleased to be seen to him. We're looking today at this section describing the transfiguration of Jesus and I want us to start by just asking you to imagine that you were on this mountain watching Jesus and his disciples walking up together.

What would you have seen? Well the answer is that you'd have seen four very ordinary looking people. And if you had followed them all the way to the top, you would have seen something utterly remarkable.

You would have seen Jesus' appearance change. That's what transfiguration means in this context, a change in outward appearance. It's described in verse 2.

[1 : 15] He was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And for that brief moment, the majesty, beauty and glory of who Jesus really is burst through as Peter, James and John looked on.

And part of that is the fulfillment of what Jesus said at the end of chapter 16 that some of the people standing with him would not taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Peter, James and John are seeing Jesus come in his kingdom at this moment and later they and others would go on to see more as they witnessed the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit in power on the day of Pentecost.

It's an absolutely remarkable event. And there's loads that we could look at and think about. But today I want us to focus especially on the word spoken by God the Father in verse 5.

This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. And in this one we sentence, God is revealing three of the most important things that we could ever consider.

[2 : 41] He's revealing who Jesus is, what Jesus does and how we need to respond. And for all of us these are crucial things to think about.

If you're a Christian all of this is a reminder that what you believe is real, it's rational and it's beautiful. If you are seeking God then this is exactly the information that you need.

And even if you are doubting or skeptical or even not that interested, you need to know who Jesus is, you need to know what he's come to do and you need to know how we're supposed to respond. Otherwise you don't know what you're rejecting. And I think it's probably safe to say that the only thing more foolish than mindless faith is mindless unbelief.

So let's go for it together. First, God the Father is saying something about who Jesus is. He says, this is my beloved Son.

[3 : 48] Now the study of Jesus is what we call Christology and there's many crucial truths to learn under that subject. I think that we are being shown here that lesson number one in Christology is that Jesus is God the Father's precious, beautiful, treasured, beloved Son.

I think that in terms of understanding who Jesus is, this is the thing that God wants us to know most of all. But I think that we can prove that, that it's lesson number one, because if you go all the way back to the beginning of Matthew's gospel to the last time that our voice came from heaven at the baptism of Jesus, we find that God the Father says exactly the same thing.

When Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him and behold, the voice from heaven said, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

Thus, the foundational truth that God the Father wants you and me to know about Jesus Christ is that he is God's Son and he is utterly loved by his Father.

And that means that if you want to understand God, you don't need to try and wrestle with impossible philosophical concepts or with mystical secrets.

[5 : 25] You just need to think about a perfect loving relationship between a Father and a Son. Now I know that for many people, their experience of a father-child relationship is far from perfect and that's an incredibly difficult thing for anyone to experience.

But whatever negative or difficult aspects you may have found in your own experience, I want you to try and just look beyond those if you can to think about everything that a father-son relationship should be.

And the more you can do that, the more you will understand what God is like. And I also want to say that this is not to exclude mothers and daughters.

That mother-daughter relationship is also used in the Bible to teach us, to powerfully teach us what God is like and about our relationship with him. But just now I want us to just focus on that father-son relationship.

That's who Jesus is. So we need to think a little bit more about what that means. It means that Jesus is unique. So to God the Father, Jesus is a one and only.

[6 : 37] From all eternity, Jesus is the precious, beautiful Son of the Father. He's different to any other. He has a place in the Father's heart that no one else has.

It means that Jesus is the object of the Father's affection. So here, God the Father is telling God the Son that he loves him.

And even though that love is eternal, and even though Jesus understands that better than we ever will, and even though God the Father has the whole universe to think about, he never neglects to tell his Son that he loves him.

And that of course is a really good example for us to remember too. And it also means that God the Father is proud of his Son.

Now, we always have to be a bit careful with that word proud. Often in the Bible it's a negative thing, and in English it's a tricky word because that word pride can refer either to something really good or to something really bad.

[7 : 47] Negatively pride refers to an arrogance and a hardness of heart, which is obviously not what I mean here. But positively, pride refers to a sense of deep satisfaction, fulfillment, and completeness.

And in that sense, I think we can say that God the Father is proud of his Son. And that's emphasized, I think, by the fact that here the Father does not hesitate to identify Jesus as his own. And you'll notice that the emphasis is not on who the Father is. He's not saying, I am his Father. All the focus is on Jesus. He's saying, this is my Son.

And I don't think that we're stretching it too far to suggest that God is saying, I want everyone to know that this is my Son, and I love him so much.

So all the love, care, joy, interest, and concern of a brilliant Father is what lies at the heart of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ, his Son.

[8 : 58] Now, in saying all that, we must not think that the Holy Spirit is separated from all of this. The very opposite is true. The Holy Spirit is actually at the heart of this. In fact, that's who the Holy Spirit is.

He is the breathing out of God's essence, proceeding from the Father to the Son, from the Son to the Father, and from God outwardly.

So perhaps we could even say that the Holy Spirit is the great carrier of love from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father, which is why this love between God the Father and God the Son is never exuding the Spirit.

It's actually where God the Holy Spirit thrives. At the heart of who God is is a beautiful loving relationship between Father and Son.

Now, this has massive implications for our worldview, how we understand reality around us. For centuries, people have wondered what lies at the foundation of reality.

[10 : 07] In other words, what's the kind of... what's at the core of existence? If you step everything else away and get reality down to its basic component, what do you find?

People have wondered about that for centuries. The ancient Greeks wondered whether it was fire or water or atoms. So some people thought that if you broke everything down to its most basic part, you'd find water.

Others said it was fire. Others said it was atoms. Others have wondered whether, rather than being a material particle, whether it's actually knowledge, like there's kind of knowledge particles that are the foundation of reality.

Others have suggested that it's energy or gravity or chance or maybe even nothing. Christianity says that at the foundation of all reality is a Father who loves His Son.

The implications of this are huge because for us as humans, most people, I think, would agree that a loving relationship is the best experience that we can have.

[11 : 21] So both in terms of a parent to a child or in terms of marriage, a relationship that's really loving and full of care and joy and kindness, that's the dream. It's what we long for.

It's what we aspire to. It's the ideal that we'd love to be able to reach. And some people get quite near to that. Others don't get anywhere close.

But for us all, it's the pinnacle. It's the best. But with God, a beautiful, loving relationship is not ultimate, it's basic.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. When I say basic, I'm not saying that it's insignificant or unimportant. What I'm saying is that this is the foundational starting point from which everything else comes.

So in other words, we long to reach the heights of a beautiful, loving relationship in our experience. But God doesn't reach that point.

[12 : 34] God starts from that point. And that's reminding us that the very best of human experience, the very best aspects of human experience are really just the basics of God.

In other words, when we see or experience the very best of what love is meant to be, at that moment we're getting a glimpse of what God is like all the time.

What we long for, what we aspire to, what we hope for in terms of love, that's just what God is through and through. And it's the same of all God's other qualities, love, truth, justice, wisdom, joy, community.

The best that we experience is just a glimpse into the universal basics of God. So in terms of love, human experience is often a bit like being in a desert where there's not much water.

So for many of us, we are searching for love and we're struggling to find it. There's not enough to go round and even when we do find it, it doesn't last long enough.

[13 : 48] Our human experience of love, whether it's parental or with a partner, is often one of searching and longing in a desert.

But with God, love is not a desert with little water. With God, his love is an ocean of pure, fresh, clean water.

The very basic truth of Christology is that Jesus is a precious, beautiful son who is utterly loved by God the Father.

And that means that for the Christian, our worldview is grounded on the fact that love is real and that people matter.

And a key point I want to emphasize is that God the Father wants you to know this. That's why at this crucial moment at the top of the Mount of Transfiguration, the first thing that God says to us is that Jesus is his beloved son.

[14 : 50] Why is it so important that we know that? Well, there's at least three reasons. One, we need to know this because it corrects misunderstandings of God. So for example, it's easy to think of God as an absent Father.

He's too busy, he's not interested, he's got better things to do and you're not particularly important. It's easy to think of God as a harsh Father, always demanding more, never happy, always finding fault, impatient, angry, cruel, and you're just another source of frustration to him.

It's easy to think of God as a cold Father. So yes, he's powerful, authoritative, and strong, but he's also intimidating and distant and you're a long way down the line of things he cares about.

It's easy to think of God as a reluctant Father, almost as though being Father is an inconvenience and is not as important as being holy or righteous or almighty and you have to make sure you impress him if he's going to take any interest in you.

It is so easy to think of God in these terms and they are all totally wrong. At the heart of God's being is a loving Father, a beloved Son, and a Holy Spirit pouring and carrying and sharing that love.

[16 : 12] Two, we need to know this because it's telling us who we are dealing with whenever we interact with Jesus. And the crucial point we have to recognize is that everyone is interacting with

Jesus.

Some of us are interacting positively, so we worship Jesus, we talk to him, we follow him, we serve him, and in every way that you do that, you should be hearing God the Father's voice saying, this is my beloved Son.

That's why your praise is a delight to God, no matter how good or bad you are at singing. That's why your prayers in Jesus' name are so precious, no matter how long or short or eloquent they may be.

That's why your service for him is so valued as you offer your gifts to him for his work because everything that you do for Jesus is being done for the one who is utterly loved by his Father.

But other people are interacting negatively with Jesus. So many people ignore him, reject him, some even look down on him, and a huge amount of people think that they don't need him.

[17:32] That was through of the Pharisees in the New Testament and the other religious leaders. It's through of the crowds today, maybe it's through of you.

But if that is you, then I want you to realize that every time you do that, God the Father is saying to you, this is my beloved Son.

And three, we need to know who Jesus is because God's ultimate goal is to make you like him.

That brings us on to the second thing that God says in verse five. He says, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. These words are telling us what Jesus has come to do.

Now, of course, at one level, these words are echoing what we've just been saying, that part of the fact that the Father loves Jesus means that he's well pleased with him. God the Son is a delight to God the Father.

[18:36] But I think there's a little bit more to it than that, that we need to make sure we understand. That phrase that you can see on the screen with whom I am well pleased, it's already appeared twice in the Gospel of Matthew.

Once way back in chapter three, which we read at Jesus' baptism, the other time is in Matthew chapter 12. As Jesus confronted the religious leaders and as he healed those who were oppressed, Matthew says that what Jesus did, this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, behold my servant whom I've chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my spirit upon him and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. So the phrase, with whom I'm well pleased, is pointing us, as Matthew tells us, back to the prophecy of Isaiah and in particular it's chapter 42, which is where Matthew is quoting from.

And that's really important because Isaiah chapter 42 is one of the key chapters in that book where it speaks about God's servant.

And I think that part of that phrase, with whom I am well pleased, is telling us that a key aspect of why the Father is well pleased with his son is not just because he loves him, but because the son is his servant.

[20:05] He's obeying the Father and he's doing what the Father wants and needs him to do. And that makes perfect sense because you can love someone but not be pleased with them if they're going down the wrong path.

With Jesus, it's never like that. He is fulfilling the mission that the Father has given him.

And that fulfillment of mission and of God's purposes is emphasized by the appearance of Moses and Elijah. These are two massive figures from the Old Testament.

And their appearance here along with Jesus is pointing us to the fact that Jesus has come not to replace or contradict everything that Moses and Elijah did and taught, but instead he's come to fulfill everything that they were pointing towards.

There's two important points here I want to highlight and both are in relation to humanity which instantly includes all of us. First of all, we're being reminded that Jesus Christ and Christ likeness is pleasing to God the Father.

[21:20] Now, on the one hand, that probably seems really obvious. Jesus is the Son of God. He shares God's nature. He's one with him and therefore when we look at Jesus, we see the character of God.

In other words, if you look at Jesus, you see what true divinity looks like. And obviously that's going to please the Father. But on the other hand, it's also important to remember, really important to remember that when you look at Jesus, you don't just see what true divinity is like.

You also see what true humanity is meant to be. Jesus, the beloved Son of God, is also the perfect human.

He's the most human of all humans. So if you want to see everything that humanity was created to be as image bearers of God, as loving towards God and towards others, as responsible rulers of creation, then look at Jesus.

Way back at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis chapter one, when God created humanity, He said it was very good. But after the fall, after humanity rebelled against God and sinned, God couldn't look at humanity again and say, it's very good.

[22 : 34] He couldn't say that until now. Until the moment when Jesus came, because once again, God finally sees what a very good humanity looks like.

That's why when we say that we should be like Jesus, we're not giving kind of a sort of rosy, optimistic, self-help advice. When we say that we should be like Jesus, we are describing the fulfillment of the created purpose of humanity.

And that's why studying the life of Jesus is so important. And what you discover is amazing, because when you look at Jesus, you see a human who loves the outcast, who challenges corruption, who protects the weak, who delights to spend time with people, who takes an interest in others, who goes out and explores what he lives and who stands up for what is right no matter what it costs.

In other words, we discover the kind of person that we all long for. Who in the world wants a leader who is corrupt or colleagues who are selfish or friends, who are fickle or injustice, that's glossed over or a way of life that's dull?

No one. And the ultimate example of the opposite of all those things is Jesus. And that's why, that's part of the reason why Jesus is well-pleasing to his father.

[24 : 00] Because everything humanity is meant to be. But alongside that, the father is well-pleased with Jesus, not just because he's come to model perfect humanity, but because he has come to save a broken humanity.

And that's why the most astonishing thing in this narrative is not that Jesus went up to the mount of transfiguration and that his face shone and his clothes became dazzling. The most astonishing thing is not that he went up and was transfigured, the most astonishing thing is that he came back down.

And as he came down, he points the disciples forward to what's about to happen. He told them to keep quiet at that stage because this is not the end of the story. There's more to come.

Jesus is going down from the dazzling splendor of the top of this mountain down to the sea of Jerusalem, down into the hands of the soldiers and down into the depths of suffering and death on the cross.

And because he is willing to do that and because he is determined to do that, his father is well-pleased.

[25 : 17] And the amazing truth is that the reason he's well-pleased is because if Jesus does all that, then God can save you.

And ultimately, that's what Jesus has come to do. He's come to save you. He's come to die in your place. He's come to free you from all the guilt and burden of your sin.

He's come to bring you back into a relationship with God. He's come to restore you to the person you were created to be and he's come to welcome you into God's family and to give you all the incredible blessings of eternal life in God's kingdom.

In other words, he has come to make you like him. That means that going back to our desert ocean illustration, God's love isn't just an ocean of pure, clean, fresh water.

He's also got the Niagara Falls pouring out of it because God's great goal is to share his love through his Son Jesus.

[26 : 30] And the key question is, how do we respond? And the answer is given in the third thing that God says.

This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. Now, I will forgive you if you find yourself thinking, is that it?

Is the key to eternal life, security and peace just listening to Jesus? Is that all we have to do in response? And the answer is yes, it is as simple as that.

But you might say, well, that seems a bit confusing because in so many ways Jesus' mission is based on his actions, on stuff he does. And he's just been talking to his disciples about things that he will do and things that will happen to him.

And it's true that when we talk about the death and resurrection of Jesus, we talk about his works. However, the key to benefiting from all the works that Jesus does is to listen to what he says about everything that he is doing.

[27 : 51] That's why Christianity is not grounded on a particular place or a ritual or an activity. Christianity is grounded on words.

And that's why we have to listen. And this point is powerfully reinforced in the narrative before us because as you can see there in verse four, Peter at this moment suggests making a tent or making three tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah because he thinks that it's good for them to be there.

In other words, Peter wants to hold on to this moment and he wants to hold on to this place. And we can very easily do the same thing.

Often in our kind of spiritual journey, we're tempted to hold on to a particular moment or a particular location that's of significance to us.

So we can have or hope to have this experience that we can then always look back on and always hold on to or this place where something special happened.

[28 : 57] And we can hold on to that as well. It's so easy to do that and to make that our focus, but God has got no interest in making that the central idea.

And that's why Christianity is different to the many other religions that we see in the world that try to hold on to a particular location or a building or a practice or an experience.

God is saying that's not what this is about, instead he says, listen to my son.

And that's reminding us that all the works of Jesus will have no benefit for you whatsoever unless you listen.

Now at this point we have to be careful because there are many counterfeits to listening to Jesus.

[29 : 56] So to give you two or three examples, there's the pitfall of thinking that listening to Jesus is purely mystical. So we maybe think, well, we have to kind of wait for a voice to come to us to tell us something.

And as we do so, we isolate ourselves into a kind of cocoon of our own making. And we interpret all the events of the world around us in reference to ourselves as the center point of it all.

Or we can be selective as we listen to Jesus. In other words, we just choose the things that we like, the things that fit our tradition or our context, or the things that back up our point of view or that keep things the way we like them to be.

Or we can think that our listening to Jesus is purely cerebral. In other words, it's just to do with our heads.

That what we hear, we just keep this information in our heads and it has no real effect on our day-to-day lives. When God says, listen to Jesus, I don't think He means any of these things because these are actually all examples of not listening.

[31 : 10] So if we have Jesus' words before us in the Bible, but we go looking for some kind of mystical additions, then we're not listening to what's right in front of us in the pages of Scripture.

If we are selective about what we want to hear, then maybe we're listening to some, but we're not listening to half or more of what Jesus is saying.

And if what we hear just stays in our heads and has no effect on our lives, then we're not listening either.

Instead, we're actually judging because we're concluding that Jesus' words aren't important enough for us to put into practice.

And all the time we are being driven back to this simple instruction from God, this is my beloved Son, listen to Him.

[32 : 06] And that simply means trusting Him, learning from Him and following Him in obedience.

And all of this is instantly confronting us with the question, who are you listening to? Or who are you listening to about what really matters in life?

I don't know, but if you listen to Jesus, He will tell you the truth about your origin, your purpose, and your destiny.

Who are you listening to about where you can find hope and joy and peace? If you listen to Jesus, He will tell you how Almighty God is channeling all His resources into saving you.

Who are you listening to about what's right and wrong? If you listen to Jesus, He will show you an unchanging ethical standard about what's really true, what's right, and what's good.

[33 : 22] And perhaps most importantly of all, who are you listening to about what you're worth? Because the world will tell you that your worth will come from your talents or your successes or your achievements or your social life.

But if you listen to Jesus, He will tell you that you are the workmanship of God and you are infinitely precious to Him and Jesus Himself was willing to die to bring you into God's family.

All of this is why Christianity is not blind or mindless. It is grounded on sensible, logical, attentive listening.

And all of this is why Christianity is so beautiful. Because if you think again about that illustration of the desert and the ocean, we're saying that God's love is an ocean of pure, clean, fresh water.

We're saying that the Niagara Falls are pouring out of it, and I know that that's a bit of a strange illustration, but just try and imagine that in your minds and ask the question, where does God want you to be in that picture?

[34 : 47] Does He want you on a kind of viewing platform looking on? No. He wants you right under that waterfall so that He can pour His love into you today and tomorrow and forever.

And all of that is bringing us back to the fact that in this little statement from God, we are being told about three of the most important things we could ever consider.

Who Jesus is, what Jesus does, and how we need to respond. And I've tried to say three main things. Who is Jesus, He is God's beloved Son, which means that at the heart of who God is and at the heart of reality is a beautiful, loving relationship.

What does Jesus do? He has come to please His Father by fulfilling a mission to rescue humanity, which includes you and me.

And how do we respond? We respond by listening to Him, and that has to be a listening that is grounded on trusting Him, that is willing to learn from Him, and that is ready to follow and obey Him.

[36 : 10] And what happens if you do that? Well, imagine you could go back to the top of this mountain again with Jesus.

If you are a Christian, you're trusting in Jesus, or if you become a Christian by putting your trust in Him today, imagine you could stand there at the top of the mountain, and once again you would hear God the Father say about Jesus, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him.

But then He would look at you, and He would say, I want you to listen to me. Because of all that my Son has done, I am well pleased with you too, and you, you too, are also my precious, beautiful, beloved child.

That is what Jesus wants to do for you today, and that is why knowing Him and following Him is the most amazing thing that we can ever have in our lives.

Amen. Let us pray. Father, we thank you so much for your beloved Son, Jesus, and we thank you for all that He has done that is pleasing to you and that has fulfilled your great mission of salvation.

[37 : 48] And help us, help us all, oh God, to listen to Him, to really listen. Amen.