

In the Beloved

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“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”—Ephesians 1:6

We must now look at the last three words in this sixth verse — “in the beloved”. They constitute one of these magnificent summaries of the gospel. As we have seen, the Apostle emphasizes that we must always think of the gospel in terms of the glory of God. It is all “to the praise of the glory of his grace”. He has also reminded us, and especially in this sixth verse, of the extraordinary privileges that we enjoy as the result of being accepted (highly favoured) “in the beloved”. The Apostle then proceeds to tell us how God has manifested His glory in our salvation: it is “in the beloved”. Every blessing that man ever enjoys from God is always in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words we are entitled to say that God’s glory is revealed ultimately and finally and most completely in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We note again the Apostle’s reference to our Lord. We have noted previously the way in which the Apostle keeps on repeating the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He mentions Him twice in the first verse, calling himself “an apostle of Jesus Christ”, and referring to the saints as “the faithful which are in Christ Jesus”. He mentions Him once in the second verse: “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is obvious that nothing gave the Apostle greater pleasure than to refer to the Name of the Lord. We find the Name twice in the third verse: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ”. Paul cannot leave Him alone, he constantly brings in the Name. Then he mentions Him again in the fourth verse: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” He seems to fear that we shall forget Him or leave Him out of our thinking. Once more we find the Name in the fifth verse — “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” And then suddenly, at the end of the sixth verse, instead of saying “to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Lord Jesus Christ”, he says, “wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved”.

We must ask why the Apostle varied his terms. We can be quite certain that it was not accidental. He is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so nothing he does is accidental. He has been using the terms “Jesus Christ”, “the Lord Jesus Christ” and “Christ”, but suddenly he speaks of “the beloved”. Why does he do so? As we come to consider this let us remind ourselves that when we are reading the Scriptures we must never take anything for granted; we must always be alert and alive, and always ready to ask questions. How easily one can miss the great blessings found in the very introduction to an Epistle such as this by simply sliding over the terms as if they did not matter! The Apostle deliberately says “in the beloved” and not “in the Lord Jesus Christ” or “in Jesus Christ” or “in Christ”. He does so, I suggest, because he is concerned to bring out in its full force and intensity what is after all the most wonderful thing of all about this great salvation. It is a glorious and wonderful thing that you and I should be made holy; it is equally marvellous that we are made, by adoption, the sons of God. It is almost incredible, but nevertheless true, that it is through people like ourselves that God is eventually going to show to “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” His manifold wisdom; it is by the Church that He plans to manifest the glory of His wisdom. But the most wonderful thing of all about this salvation is the way in which God has done all this. He has done so, says the Apostle, reaching the topmost height of his climax, “in the beloved”.

Let us observe its emphasis. This is the key that leads us into the whole mystery of the Incarnation, and all that God has done in His Son. It is “in the beloved”. The first message that this phrase conveys to us is about the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Paul’s way of reminding us that the Lord Jesus Christ is God’s beloved Son, God’s “only begotten Son”. This is what makes Christianity and its salvation unique and separate and different from everything else. It is not the record of man trying to rise up to God and

trying to find God; it is the record of what God has done, and especially through His only begotten Son. "The beloved" is the term that is always used to emphasize this truth. For instance, we find it in connection with our Lord's baptism. A voice came from heaven which said: "This is my beloved Son", or "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3: 17). Again we find it in the record of what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration. The voice again came from heaven, and said: "This is my beloved Son, hear him" (Matthew 17:5). Each time when the veil of heaven is drawn back a little, as it were, and man is given some glimpse of the eternal glory through the Son, this is the term that is used.

Our Lord Himself also used the term "beloved" in His parable of the wicked husbandman. He points out in His story how the master had sent various servants to his vineyard in order to plead with those husbandman to do their work properly, and to warn them, and so on. But they took them and killed them all. Then the master says to himself, "I will send my beloved son, him they will honour" (Matthew 21:37). Our Lord uses the term in describing Himself in that parable, knowing that it is the term His heavenly Father habitually and characteristically uses with respect to Him "the beloved". All this emphasizes the fact that our redemption has been worked out and achieved through the only begotten Son of God. We have seen that we become sons by adoption, but that He is Son by eternal generation. He is one with the Father, one substance, indivisibly. The only begotten of the Father, coming eternally out of the Father—one with the Father, indivisibly, inseparably. The term "beloved" conveys all that to us; and the Apostle clearly used it deliberately in order to bring out that aspect of the truth, and to emphasize it. "The beloved" is none other than the Substance of the eternal Substance - God, the eternal Son.

We have seen also that, as the result of being made holy, and as the result of our adoption as sons, we are to live "to the praise of the glory of God". And the world is to see something of the glory of God in us and through us. But God's glory is manifested in its fulness and intensity in the Person of His Son, "the beloved". The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it in the words: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:1-3). Our Lord is "the brightness of God's glory", He is "the express image of God's person". So what we are told here is that our redemption has been achieved, and made possible, because God has sent into this world His beloved Son, the brightness of His own glory and the express image of His own Person, the outshining, the effulgence of the glory and the majesty and the brightness of God Himself.

The Apostle John in the same manner, in the Prologue of his Gospel, in the fourteenth verse says, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". John says, in effect, We have seen His glory. Though He came in the likeness of sinful flesh; though He humbled Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant, we saw something of the shining forth of the glory. He and others had seen it on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in other places, and they had seen it after the Lord's resurrection.

So when we consider the great statements in these verses, and as we think about the glory of God as it has manifested itself in the redemption of men, we must never forget that this is the highest point in the manifestation of that glory, that God Himself has come in the Person of the Son, the Beloved, the One in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily". In the man Jesus we see "The Word made flesh". All that is conveyed to us in this term "the beloved". The Son, however, is not only the "only begotten" and not only the "express image" of God's Person, and "the brightness of his glory"; because of this relationship He is One whom the Father has loved from all eternity. God loves us, but not in that way. There was never a beginning of the Father's love for the Son. He is "the beloved", the One apart, the One who has always enjoyed the whole of God's love, the One on whom the whole of God's love and affection are centred, and in whom they dwell. There is no term which expresses so perfectly, and so completely, the relationship between the Father and the Son as this expression "the beloved". So as we think of the Babe of Bethlehem, as we think of the meaning of the Incarnation, remember who it is that God sent forth - His Son, "the beloved"; the eternally loved One. It is He who has come into the world in order to save us.

But let us now go on to look at this term as it is a measure of the Father's love toward us. The Apostle has been emphasizing, as the whole Bible emphasizes, that our salvation is the result of the love and the grace and the mercy of God. But if we would really know the love of God we must grasp something of the truth about this Person. Those who claim to believe in the love of God without believing in the Lord Jesus Christ are simply displaying their ignorance of the love of God. There are people who are foolish enough to say that they cannot believe in the Virgin Birth and the Incarnation, that they cannot believe in the Atonement, and the punishment of sin, because of their belief in the love of God. But thereby they merely display a fundamental ignorance of the love of God. To know something of the love of God one must have some understanding of what has happened in and to the Son of God, "the beloved". It is in Him that we measure the love of God truly. The very fact that God ever sent Him into this world is astounding in and of itself. We cannot conceive of these things; our minds are too small, they boggle at the very conception. We cannot conceive of eternity, bound as we are by the idea of time. We ourselves, and our minds, are finite, so our very thinking is limited. It is difficult for us to grasp the idea that there was never any beginning to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, that they exist from eternity to eternity.

The fact is that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son, was in the bosom of the Father from eternity. That is the term used by the Apostle John in his Prologue: "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." He was eternally in the bosom of the Father, enjoying the unmixed and perfect bliss and love and holiness and glory of heaven and of eternity; and the astounding thing we are told in connection with our salvation is that "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent him forth" (Galatians 4:4), sent Him out from that glory, out from heaven and the radiance and the glory and the magnificence of it all, sent Him forth into the world.

It was the Father who sent Him. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). It is only in the light of that fact that we begin to measure the eternal love of God. It was His own beloved, His only begotten Son that God sent forth upon this terrible errand, and for such terrible people! Like the father in our Lord's parable of the wicked husbandmen, God the eternal Father sends His own Son, His only Son. He had sent his prophets and other leaders, but they had been rejected and their message had been ignored; but now the time comes when the eternal Father says, I will send forth My Son, My beloved Son, I will send Him to them.

Further, if we are to have some conception of the love of God we must read the four Gospels, and in our minds and imaginations we must think of God the Father looking down upon all and observing and watching what was happening to His beloved Son. All parents, surely, know something of this experience. They send their children out on the voyage of life, and they watch them, they keep their eye upon them, they see the storms and trials coming, and they watch with concern, with love, at times trembling for them, fearful for them. Multiply that by infinity and we still have no conception of what it meant to the eternal Father to send His Son into the sea of sin and evil in this world. Such is the love of God. He sees men reviling His Son, He sees men laughing at Him, He sees men taking up stones to throw at Him, His Beloved. The God who made the world out of nothing, and who could bring it to an end in a moment, the God with whom nothing is impossible looks on and watches the world refusing His "beloved", persecuting Him and wounding Him. There we have some measure of the love of God. As you read the story in the four Gospels remember that it is "the beloved" you are reacting about, and that the Father is ever looking at His Beloved and at the world's treatment of Him.

But let us hasten on to the most astounding thing of all. We see Him staggering up Golgotha, we see Him nailed to a tree. The Father is still looking down upon it all. The Beloved is finally rejected, despised of men, spat upon, scourged, hated, reviled, nailed to the tree. We cannot conceive the agony, the suffering, the shame that were involved. The Father looks at His Beloved as He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. That is the measure of God's love. As the Apostle Paul expresses it in chapter 8 of his Epistle to the Romans, "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all". He did not spare the Beloved, though He had loved Him with that eternal love from all eternity, and with all the intensity of His divine being; though He is "the beloved", His Father did not spare Him. He spared Him no suffering. He "laid upon him the iniquity of us all"; He struck Him, He smote Him with those stripes which we deserved. And the reason why He did not spare Him any suffering was that you and I might be forgiven.

Thou didst not spare Thine only Son
But gav'st Him for a world undone,
And freely with that blessed One
Thou givest all.

If you would know anything about the love of God you must start with this term "the beloved". It was of this "beloved" that Paul says that God has "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He made His Beloved a sin offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

But let us look at this term for a moment as it is the measure of the Son's love. We have been looking at it as the measure of the Father's love; let us now look at it from the other side. We must not compare them, it would be wrong and it would be foolish to do so. And yet there is a difference between a father and a son, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God eternally, and sonship is sonship for Him also. So we can look at the Son's love and what the procuring of our salvation meant to Him. Try for a moment to think of the self-emptying that took place at the Incarnation in terms of this expression "the beloved". He who had been in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, enjoying perfect unmixed bliss, decides to leave it for a while. He through whom all things were made, and by whom all things consist, the everlasting Word, the Word of God, the express image of God's person, humbles Himself, He divests Himself of the insignia, the signs of His eternal glory, and says "Here am I, send me". He volunteered to become a man, to take unto Himself human nature, to lay aside the prerogatives of His position and of His unique relationship to the Father. And He entered into the Virgin's womb. It is "the beloved" who was there, going through the whole process of development as an embryo. It is inconceivable, it is baffling; but it is true. Then the time came when He was born in a stable and for want of a cradle they put Him in a manger.

Who is that helpless infant? It is "the beloved" - the one on whom the love of God had been poured from all eternity. Now He knows something about weakness and helplessness. Follow the story through - the suffering, the misunderstanding, "the contradiction of sinners". He spent eighteen years apparently quite unknown, indeed until the age of thirty. He who had experienced all the fulness of God directly in love, has now humbled Himself and put Himself into such a position that He knows what it is to be lonely, to feel a sense of desertion, and to meet face to face the contradiction of sinners. He who made all things is suffering at the hands of the very people whom He had made. That is the measure of His love. Look at the despising and the persecution that followed. We cannot understand what it meant to Him except in the light of this term "the beloved". How glad we should be that the Apostle did not say "the Lord Jesus Christ" here, but instead said "in the beloved"!

The height of the paradox of this love, the thing that no human mind can encompass, is that when you stand at the foot of the Cross and listen, you hear these words being uttered: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Everyone else had forsaken Him, His disciples had fled and had left Him, but now He cries, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me"? The one who utters that cry is "the beloved", the one who had basked in the sunshine of the eternal love from eternity, without intermission. He reaches a point wherein even He has lost sight of the face and the smile of His Father. And He experienced that for you, for me. If He had shrunk from it we would not be saved, we would not be forgiven, we would not be Christians, we would not be children of the second birth. The "beloved" descended even to that degree of ignominy and died. His body was buried in a grave and a stone was rolled against its door. He descended into hell - "the beloved". He went "into the lowest parts of the earth" - He who had made everything out of nothing. And it was for us, and for our salvation. It is only as we realize who it is who is suffering in that manner that we realize the depth and the intensity of His love toward us.

Our final thought is that this term "the beloved" tells us about our relationship to God. So far we have been dealing with His relationship to God; now let us look at the term as it expresses our relationship to God. Let us climb with the Apostle from rung to rung as he moves up this tremendous ladder. We are called, we are chosen to holiness, to sonship, to the praise of God's glory - yes, even higher, as this word reminds us. We are to be loved by God even as His Son was loved by Him. Have I gone too far? am I exaggerating? Have I suddenly given rein to my imagination? Am I going beyond the Scripture? I answer by quoting the words of the Son Himself, in His high priestly prayer in the Gospel of John, chapter 17,

verse 23: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me" - and then, and most astounding of all - "and hast loved them as thou hast loved me". I confess frankly that if it were not there in that verse I would not believe it; but it is there. The truth about the Christian, the truth about the one who is "in Christ", is that because he is in Christ and is adopted as a son in the Beloved, God the Father loves him as he loved His own Son - "as thou hast loved me". That is even beyond sonship, but it means an intimacy of communion with God that we share with the Son Himself. It is not only a question of rank or of position, it is not merely that we have been adopted legally: the Father now loves us as He loved the Son Himself. It is staggering and stupendous.

The Apostle not only says it here but elsewhere also. In his Epistle to the Colossians he makes an appeal for ethical conduct and morality and behaviour, and this is how he states it: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies" (3:21). Note the way in which he describes us: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God," "holy" - but still more marvellous, "beloved". We are the beloved of God. It is the ultimate height of our salvation and redemption, that the Christ who came down from the Glory to earth and went into Hades, has risen and has taken us up with Him. He has placed us in a position where we are loved as He is loved, "holy and beloved". Paul says the same thing in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord" (2:13)- We are not only brethren, we are beloved, "beloved of the Lord", because God "hath from the beginning chosen (us) to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth".

Are you convinced, are you satisfied? Do you realize that that is the ultimate height of salvation? It is because everything we have is "in the beloved" that we ourselves become "the beloved" of God. God loves the Christian as He loves the Son; we share that love, nothing less. Have you ever been tempted to think that God is not fair to you, that God is dealing rather harshly and unkindly with you? Never harbour such a thought again. Whether you understand what is happening to you, or not, this is the truth concerning you. In Christ, and because He is "the beloved", you are the beloved of God also. We are "brethren, beloved of God".

"The Son of God became the Son of man," said Calvin, "that the sons of men might be made the sons of God". Yes, and I add, "beloved of God" because we are "in the beloved".