

The Stature of John the Baptist

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to read from God's Word now. This morning, Edward will be speaking to us again from the Gospel of John, continuing his series.

So let's read from John chapter 3, and we'll read verses 22 to 36. So that's John chapter 3, verse 22 to 36.

Now, a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, he is baptizing and all are going to him.

John answered, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I've been sent before him.

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete.

[1 : 44] He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way.

He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.

For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the spirit without measure. The father loves the son and has given all things into his hand.

Whoever believes in the son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the son shall not see life. But the wrath of God remains on him.

Amen. This is the word of God. Well, good morning, friends. Let's turn to John's Gospel, chapter 3. And this passage, which begins at verse 22.

[2 : 48] My title for this morning is the statue of John the Baptist. Now, we'll drive off down the fairway to use a golfing analogy in just a moment.

But before we do that, I want first to tee things up so that we can begin to see what kind of material we're dealing with here in this final section of John, chapter 3. This part of the third chapter of John is not as well known as the first 21st verses, but it's massively important.

Because, although it does tell us a lot about John the Baptist, its real focus of interest is Jesus. And he is the one that all of us need to keep thinking about.

John the Baptist really acts as a kind of foil to Jesus. His part in the story is to help us to see more clearly who Jesus is. And John's Gospel is all about who Jesus is and about how it's appropriate for people, human beings, to respond to him.

Now, as we tee up the ball before launching down the fairway, let me make three preliminary points, brief points. First, now most of you will know this very well, but newcomers to the Bible may not know it.

[4 : 08] There are two different men named John that we're dealing with. There's John the Baptist. He was the one who baptized Jesus and many other people.

He was the one who was beheaded by King Herod in about 30 AD. So John the Baptist. But secondly, there's John the Evangelist, the author of this book, and who wrote other later parts of the New Testament as well, and who almost certainly died in old age in about 90 AD.

John the Evangelist was one of the 12 apostles. John the Baptist, of course, was not one of the apostles. So these are two very different men, and they're playing very different parts in the story of Jesus.

Now, if you're here at Kelvin Grove, I know others are watching from elsewhere. Camera guys, I should have spoken to you about this beforehand. Is it possible for you to get the camera up onto the top right-hand part of the window there?

Don't worry if it's not. Okay, good. Anyway, whether you can see it or not, those of you who are certainly here, maybe others watching on screen, look at the top right-hand part of that window there, because you will see that the two Johns, as it happens, are pictured there.

[5 : 28] Top right, wearing that rather luminous turquoise blue robe, is John the Evangelist. He looks a little bit ethereal, doesn't he? He's got a book in one hand, I think, and a pen in the other.

He's the author. That's John the Apostle, John the Evangelist. But next to him, there is John the Baptist, who's a very different kind of figure. He's got legs like a rugby player, hasn't he?

And he's wearing sandals and rough clothes and a brown beard, which shows that he's a young man. Of course, he didn't live long enough to grow a gray beard. King Herod saw to that.

So there are the two of them pictured there. Now, here in our passage for this morning, we have John the Evangelist writing about John the Baptist. So there's the first thing, two Johns.

Now, secondly, John the Evangelist sets the scene for us here in the first three verses, verses 22, 3, and 4. There's a chronological note in verse 22 after this, which simply means after Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus, recorded in the earlier part of the chapter.

[6 : 34] Then we have a geographical note in verses 22 and 23. In verse 23, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside where Jesus was baptizing.

If you look across to chapter 4, verse 2, John clarifies things by telling us that it was actually the disciples of Jesus and not Jesus himself who were doing the baptizing.

And then verse 23, we learn that John the Baptist was also baptizing people, not in quite the same place as Jesus, but at a place called Enon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there.

Aha! Two different baptizing locations. Jesus and his disciples at one watery spot. John the Baptist at a different riverside location.

Why two centers of baptism? Was there competition for business? Was there rivalry? We'll come back to that in a moment.

[7 : 35] Now, thirdly, a word about the structure of this passage. We noticed last week that in chapter 3, verses 1 to 15 are narrative, where John the Evangelist tells the story of Jesus meeting Nicodemus.

And then verses 16 to 21 are words of explanation, where the Evangelist unpacks the meaning of verse 15 about eternal life. Now, we have just the same kind of structure today.

Verses 22 to 30 are narrative, where the Evangelist records the conversation between John the Baptist and his disciples. And then verses 31 to 36 are words of explanation, where the Evangelist again steps back from the narrative.

So, John the Baptist, you'll see, finishes speaking at verse 30. He must increase, but I must decrease. And then from verse 31 to the end of the chapter, the Evangelist is making his own explanatory comments, in which he draws out the implications of what John the Baptist has been saying in verses 27 to 30.

So, this is why we need to be clear about the two Johns. John the Baptist is speaking in verses 27 to 30. And then John the Evangelist is unpacking and explaining and teaching us in verses 31 to 36.

[8 : 58] But, although the two Johns are so prominent and so important, this passage is all about Jesus, as we shall see. The truth is, there is not a single verse in John's Gospel that is not about Jesus.

Okay, down the fairway, let us go. I want to take the passage in two sections, under two headings. First, verses 25 to 30, where Jesus is presented to us as the bridegroom.

And then, verses 31 to 36, where Jesus is presented to us as God's Son, who has all the authority of heaven. First then, Jesus the bridegroom, from verses 25 to 30.

Now, it's important that we have a little picture in our minds of the geographical setting here, and the fact that we have two different places where people are being baptized, with John the Baptist operating at one spot, and Jesus and his disciples, which would have included John the Evangelist, because he was one of the twelve at a different location.

Now, verse 25 tells us that a discussion arose between a certain Jew and John's disciples over purification. Well, that would have been some kind of theological discussion.

[10 : 16] They'd have been asking, what does John's baptism mean? How did it relate to other types of Jewish purification rituals involving water? Perhaps a rather high-end intellectual discussion.

Maybe it got rather heated. These discussions do. Maybe voices got raised. But John the Evangelist is not in the least bit interested in the discussion about purification rites.

That's not what this passage is about. It's the way things developed from verse 26 onwards, that's what the evangelist is interested in. Look at verse 26.

John's disciples come to John the Baptist, and they say to him, Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, that's Jesus, to whom you bore witness, look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.

Now, they're referring to Jesus. They're speaking with resentment, perhaps with jealousy at this point, which I think you can understand. Think of what's been going on with John the Baptist for some months.

[11 : 20] His disciples and John the Baptist have been on a roll for a long time. It's been a period of great excitement for them. Just listen to the way that Mark writes it up at the very beginning of his gospel.

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

All of Judea, all Jerusalem, thousands of people going out to John the Baptist, to the river, grannies and granddads hobbling along on sticks, rough-handed middle-aged men, delicate ladies, wondering about their dresses and what they'd look like if they got them wet, little boys and girls running around, cheeking each other and doing cartwheels and blowing raspberries.

A thrilling time this must have been for John's disciples. It must have seemed like revival. In a sense, it was revival. And now, suddenly, the plug seems to be being pulled on their work.

Verse 26, everyone's going to this other guy now. What's going on, John? Is this the end of the road for our work? Is this rival going to steal the limelight from us?

[12 : 39] Now, they need not have said that or thought it. If you will, just turn back a page to John chapter 1. John chapter 1, verse 19. To an incident which had already taken place just a short time previously.

Chapter 1, verse 19. There's John the Baptist and no doubt his disciples were with him. And a delegation is sent, priests and Levites, from Jerusalem, from headquarters.

A delegation is sent to ask him the question, who are you? And he immediately says, it's a very strange reply, but he says, I'm not the Christ.

Now, why should he say that? Well, simply because people were wondering if he might be. There was such a hoo-ha, a burr, being created around him.

All these people. Is this the Christ? So he immediately says, no, I'm not. Well then, the delegation goes on. Might you be Elijah, come back from the dead? No.

[13 : 39] Might you then be the prophet, foretold in Deuteronomy chapter 18? No. Well, come on, man, don't be so elusive.

We've got to give an answer to the top brass who've sent us. What do you say about yourself? Okay, he says, I'll tell you. I'm the voice. I'm the voice of Isaiah chapter 40.

The voice crying in the wilderness makes straight the way of the Lord. All right, they say, well, here's another question. If you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet, why are you baptizing?

And John answers them, verse 26, I baptize with water. All I can do really is to make you wet. But there is another man already among us, even though his identity is not yet revealed, a greater man.

If you think I'm somebody important, you've got another thing coming. Because the one to come after me is so great that I'm not worthy even to stoop down and undo his sandals for him.

[14 : 43] Now, turn back to chapter 3, to our passage. If the Baptist's disciples had remembered that kind of conversation, they would have realized that there was no need for them to be resentful and upset that Jesus was becoming the center of attention.

So, beginning at chapter 3, verse 27, John now helps his disciples to see clearly what the relationship is between himself and Jesus.

So, he says in verse 27, A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. In other words, the God of heaven knows exactly what he's doing.

He has given me one role and he's given Jesus another. His intention was never that I should be the one to whom the whole world turns. Verse 28, Have you forgotten, my friends, what I said to that delegation who came to me the other day?

Of course you haven't forgotten. You were there with me. You can bear me witness that I said I'm not the Christ, that I'm merely his forerunner who has been sent before him to announce his arrival.

[15 : 51] I am simply like a signpost pointing to him. My message is, don't look at me, look at him. And verse 29, Let me put it like this in terms of a joyful marriage.

I'm not the bridegroom. Jesus is the bridegroom who loves and cares for the bride. I'm just the best man. I'm the bridegroom's friend. Now, thinking weddings, let's just leave this for a moment.

Think of the weddings that we celebrate here at the Tron Church. It's wedding season at the moment, isn't it? July tends to be wedding season because the weather's nice. Now, at our modern weddings, what is the best man's job?

It is merely to support the bridegroom, to mop his brow, to tie his shoelaces, to make sure his coat collar is not turned up at the back. The best man's job is not to parade himself, is it?

He's not there to say to the guests, I mean, imagine him saying this in his best man's speech. Oh, don't you think, actually, that I'm rather a finer man than the bridegroom? I mean, look at him sitting there.

[16 : 59] He's a little fellow, isn't he? He's only 5'7", whereas I'm 6'2 1/2", and I'm much more handsome than he is, more athletic and more intelligent than he is. If the best man started to speak like that, the guests would say, sit down, you foolish boy, and stop talking.

It's not about you. Now, this is what John the Baptist is saying to his friends. It's not about me. Look at verse 29. And think of this verse 29 in terms of centuries of Old Testament history.

It's about waiting and fulfillment. The friend of the bridegroom, verse 29, the best man, is waiting for the bridegroom to arrive.

I know it doesn't happen quite like this in our modern weddings, but imagine the best man standing there at the top of the aisle, waiting for the groom to arrive. And finally, he hears that voice at the back of the church that he's been waiting for, the voice of his friend, the bridegroom.

And at that moment, he smiles. Hooray, he says, under his breath. He's come at last. He's here. Let the joy, let the celebration begin. Verse 29. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete.

[18 : 14] In other words, the fulfillment of all we've been waiting for has now come. And it also means, verse 30, that the best man's role is coming to an end.

I can now fade out, says the Baptist, as the bridegroom begins his role of caring for his bride and loving her. Loving her even to the extent of laying down his life for her.

He is now the one to whom all eyes are turned. He must increase. I must decrease from this moment. The Old Testament prophets for centuries had been speaking of the Lord's people as the Lord's bride.

So this was something they would have understood. For example, the Lord himself says to his people in Jeremiah chapter 2, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness.

The prophet Isaiah, in his 62nd chapter, says this, as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

[19 : 22] God is the bridegroom. His people is the bride. Now, John the Baptist and his disciples would have known and studied these Old Testament prophecies. So they would have known that the bridegroom of the people of God was God himself.

So when John the Baptist describes Jesus as the bridegroom, he is surely implying that Jesus is God. God himself in human form. In the Old Testament prophets, it was God himself who was coming to woo and to win his bride.

So just think of what this actually means. Jesus is the bridegroom, and we who are Christians are his bride. And the point of this great picture is that we are very much loved.

Very much loved. And not only very much loved, but we're bonded to him in an everlasting and indissoluble relationship. Now, friends, surely we've hardly dared in our thinking and our praying to realize how powerful and deep is the love of our heavenly bridegroom towards us.

Paul the Apostle in Ephesians chapter 5 tells us that our human marriages are at best a pale reflection of the love between Christ and his people. And human marriage, at its best, is very lovely and very delightful.

[20 : 49] Think of some of our young couples who are getting married here at our church at this very moment. Think of them perhaps on their honeymoon. The great wedding day is over. And there they are. They've rented a cottage in Westeros.

And imagine them a few days after the wedding. It's breakfast time. About 10 o'clock in the morning. Anyway, there they are. They're sitting at the table together at the breakfast table. She is pouring out the coffee.

It smells lovely. He says to her, would you like a poached egg this morning, sweetheart, or a boiled egg? I'm very good at boiling eggs. Just think of that.

She is thrilled to hear him say that, isn't she? He's thrilled. They're both thrilled. They're together at last. The great adventure of married life is beginning.

Now, friends, if we're Christians, we are part of something far, far better than that. Something far more exciting. Far more solid.

[21 : 47] Every Christian, every Christian is part of that great marriage. And this is so encouraging for Christian people who are not married on earth. And for Christians who have been married, but whose marriages have come to an end through death or divorce.

Think of it like this. In the end, in heaven, there is one bridegroom and one marriage. And every Christian is part of that marriage.

Our human marriage arrangements on earth are temporary. But for all Christians, the great marriage bound together by a love so great that we can only guess at it, that is eternal.

It cannot be withered by time or age or adversity. Jesus is the bridegroom. Don't ever think, friends, that there's no romance in being a Christian.

Don't think of it simply as dogged duty and service. Now, of course there's duty and service and obedience. But above all, there's love. This bridegroom has laid down his life for his bride to woo her, to win her, and to bring her finally to everything that he has prepared for her.

[23 : 00] Jesus, the bridegroom. This joy of mine, says John in verse 29, is now complete, fulfilled. The Old Testament prophecies are now fulfilled.

So he's saying to his friends, his disciples, don't worry about my reputation. My role is ending and fading out. Jesus is here. Look at him. Get taken up with him.

Now, secondly, let's look on to verses 31 to 36. John the Baptist has now finished speaking, and John the Evangelist now takes over and develops his own teaching about Jesus.

And the point he's making in these final verses is that Jesus, as God's son, carries all the authority of heaven. But the Evangelist is not just bolting on a few random thoughts about Jesus in these final six verses of the chapter.

What the Evangelist says here arises directly out of what the Baptist has just been saying. If in verse 30, the Baptist must decrease while Jesus increases, the Evangelist is now telling us why this is so.

[24 : 16] Verse 31. Jesus is the one who comes from above. That's why he must increase. He is above all. Whereas John the Baptist, like all the rest of us, is of the earth.

Verse 31. And speaks in an earthly way. Human beings are finite and limited. Verse 31 is giving the reason behind what the Baptist says in verse 30.

So the Baptist is of the earth. And belongs to the earth. But let's not forget what Jesus said elsewhere about John the Baptist.

In Luke chapter 7, there's no need to look it up, but there's a moment when Jesus is surrounded by crowds and he's answering questions about John the Baptist. And he says to the crowds, referring to the times when they were flocking out of Jerusalem to be baptized by John, Jesus says, what did you go out into the wilderness to see when you went out in your thousands to John?

Did you go out to see a reed shaken by the wind? In other words, a weak man who could be swayed this way and that according to the changes of popular opinion? No.

[25 : 25] What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? A dandy in a velveteen jacket elegantly fingering smoked salmon canapes? No.

Those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in king's courts. He doesn't look like a sort of a man, does he? So Jesus went on, what did you go out to see?

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you.

I tell you, among those born of women, none is greater than John. What an accolade from the master, the greatest man to be born.

Yet John the evangelist in chapter 3 here, verse 31, ranks John rightly along with the rest of us as one who is of the earth. So isn't the contrast here in verse 31 striking.

[26 : 28] He who comes from above, that is Jesus, is above all. And John restates that description at the end of verse 31. He who comes from heaven is above all.

So the evangelist is saying, John is, Jesus is categorically different from the rest of us. Yes, he's a human being. He's born of a human mother, Mary, but he is from above and he's above all.

His origin is heaven. Just look back to Jesus' own words in verse 13 when he's talking to Nicodemus. Verse 13, he says, the son of man is the one who has descended from heaven.

He was born in Bethlehem as a human baby, but sharing the eternal throne of God from all eternity. the opening line of one of our favorite hymns puts it so well.

From heaven you came, helpless babe. There's the contrast. From heaven you came, helpless babe. At one level, a helpless infant born in squalor and poverty to a very young woman.

[27 : 37] But at the most important level, he is the one who is from above and therefore, says the evangelist, he is above all. That is why we worship him. Now the next four verses, 32, 3, 4, and 5, show the evangelist lyrically exalting Jesus and laying out before us his heavenly credentials.

First, John speaks of the words of Jesus. Look at verse 32. He, this is the one who has come from heaven, he bears witness to what he has seen and heard.

How does he bear witness? Well, by speaking. What does he speak about? He speaks about what he has seen and heard. That means what he has seen and heard in heaven.

His words reveal to us things that earthly men and women can never discover however hard we investigate things. Jesus has lived in heavenly glory with his father from eternity.

The glory of his heavenly home is his natural habitat. In coming to our world, he was coming to the dominion of darkness, the territory ruled by Satan.

[28 : 50] And into this dark world dominated by death, Jesus has brought words of truth and life. That's why his words are so precious to us. Peter, later in John's gospel, said to Jesus, you have the words of eternal life.

That's what John is saying to us here. Jesus bears witness to what he has seen and heard in heaven. That's why his words are true. But how are they received?

Look again at verse 32. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Doesn't that make your heart sink?

Think of Scotland at this very moment. what kind of words are forming the opinions of Scottish people right now at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning?

The words being read in the Sunday papers and the latest podcasts and news broadcasts, the words of political analysts, satirists, in some cases words of hatred and malice launched through social media, or perhaps for more upmarket intellectual people, the words of poets and playwrights and novelists.

[30 : 09] Jesus bears witness to what he has seen and heard, truth from God in heaven, and yet people reject his testimony.

A crabby old atheistic uncle might say to his Christian niece, are you really reading the Bible? Are you really reading the words of Jesus, Fiona?

Oh dear, dear, dear, how old-fashioned, how quaint, how very 18th century. In verse 32, John the evangelist is almost exactly repeating what Jesus himself had said to Nicodemus back in verse 11.

Look back to verse 11. Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you, that means you Jews really in this context, you do not receive our testimony.

The words of heavenly truth and life and joy are broadcast from heaven through the lips of Jesus and the world says we're not listening.

[31 : 18] But in verse 33, John qualifies what he's just said. Yes, indeed, by and large, the world dismisses the testimony of Jesus. But, says John, not everybody dismisses his words.

Verse 33, whoever receives his testimony, and there are some, sets his seal to this, in other words, voices his heartfelt agreement to this, that God is true, God the Father.

And why is that? Verse 34 tells us why. He whom God has sent, that's Jesus, utters the words of God. And how is that true?

John goes on to tell us, for God the Father gives the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, without measure, without limit, to Jesus. That's why his words are true.

So in the simplest language, what John is saying is that Jesus' words are true because God the Father has sent him and God the Father has filled him with the Holy Spirit, brimful, limitlessly full.

[32 : 23] Every word that Jesus says brings the life-giving message of the Holy Trinity to the darkened world. Now just think of that. Isn't that enough to make you toss your cap in the air and dance a highland fling down the aisle?

Well, the words of Jesus are equally the words of the Father and the Holy Spirit. They are, in short, the truth. Now John's lyrical outburst doesn't end there.

Look on to verse 35. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Now here John tells us a further truth, a truth which takes us really behind what he has just said in verse 34.

Why has God sent Jesus into the world? Why has God the Father given Jesus the Holy Spirit without measure enabling him to bear witness to everything he has seen and heard? Verse 35 tells us it's because the Father loves the Son.

Now this is a great theme that emerges several times in John's Gospel, the love for Jesus that the Father has. You find it in chapter 5, verse 20, where Jesus says, the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.

[33 : 43] The Father hides nothing from Jesus. He shows him all his great plans for salvation and judgment. The theme emerges again in chapter 15, verse 9, where Jesus says to the apostles, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

And again in chapter 17, verse 26, where Jesus is praying to the Father and he asks that the love with which you have loved me may be in my disciples.

It's a thrilling theme to think about. The Father loves the Son, delights in him, shares everything with him. It's the kind of theme that we can profitably think over while we're walking the dog or washing the dishes, or even perhaps at 11 o'clock at night when your head hits the pillow and you have two minutes before everything goes blank.

Think about that. The Father loves the Son in a perfection of relationship that is unknown to us mortals. Now we've only read the first half of verse 35.

The second half of the verse tells us what the Father's love for the Son has led the Father to do. The Father loves the Son and, as a consequence, has given all things into his hand.

[35 : 02] And that means, first and foremost, that the Father has invested Jesus with his own powers. His power to create, his power to give life and salvation, and his power to execute the sentence of death.

Think of this. Jesus has been given by the Father the power to create. Think back to chapter 1, verse 3. All things were made through him, through Jesus. Without him was not anything made that has been made.

And Jesus has been given the power to give life. In chapter 17, verse 2, Jesus prays to the Father, You have given the Son authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

And Jesus has been given the power of judgment and condemnation. Chapter 5, verse 27, The Father has given the Son authority to execute judgment.

This is what John means here in our verse 35 when he says that the Father has given all things into Jesus' hand. And just notice that word given. This comprehensive authority exercised by Jesus has been given to him by the Father.

[36 : 18] The great powers of creation and salvation and judgment which are proper to the Father, they're his powers. These powers have been entrusted, given to Jesus because the Father loves him.

We hear just the same thing from Jesus' own lips at the very end of Matthew's Gospel where he says all authority, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

John 3, verse 35 shows us something that we might not otherwise have known and that is that all this has been given to Jesus because the Father loves him.

How great then is our Lord Jesus? Doesn't this expand our view of him? Doesn't this compel us in our hearts to bow down and worship him?

Well, we started by thinking of the stature of John the Baptist. So what is John the Baptist's stature? Jesus tells us that among those born of women, none is greater than John.

[37 : 25] But the Baptist pictures himself as nothing more than the best man at the wedding whose joy is to hear the bridegroom's voice and then to melt away into obscurity.

John the Baptist is merely of the earth and can only speak in an earthly way. And the evangelist uses the figure of the Baptist as a contrast or a foil to the figure of Jesus.

There is John the Baptist, a great man, a very great man, but merely a man. And here, by contrast, is Jesus. He comes from heaven. He is above all.

He speaks truly of what he has seen and heard in the councils of eternity. He speaks the words of God because God has filled him to overflowing with the spirit, the spirit of truth.

And, says the evangelist, he carries all the authority of heaven. The Father has given all things into his hand, the power to give eternal life and the power to send to hell.

[38 : 29] This passage is really about the stature of Jesus. So, the evangelist is saying to us, consider the Son of God because each one of us must respond to him one way or the other.

And in verse 36, he lays out before us the two ways and there are only two ways in which a person can respond to Jesus. First, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

So, the evangelist is urging each one of us believe in him, trust him, stake everything on him for this life and for eternity. Is it possible that the one into whose hand God has entrusted all things could let us down or prove to be an unsatisfactory master?

Of course not, the evangelist is saying. Believe in him, come to him, bow down before him. What is the alternative then? Well, there it is in the painful truth of the second half of verse 36.

Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. Do you notice an unexpected little revelation there?

[39 : 43] Not little, it's a big revelation. The alternative to belief in Jesus in verse 36 is not unbelief, it's disobedience. The gospel is so much more than an appeal or an invitation.

It's a command from heaven. To turn away from Jesus, to insist on being the captain of one's own soul, is to defy God and his love.

It's to say to Jesus, you may have come to the world to save me, you may have come to seek me out and to die for my salvation, but I'm having none of it. It's on those who respond like that that the wrath of God remains.

whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Let's be assured of that, but equally sure of this, that whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. And in a moment of quietness, let's each of us respond to the message of the gospel, this lovely invitation and command from heaven to put our trust in Jesus.

[41 : 06] Jesus. We pray, dear Father in heaven, that you will have mercy upon us, upon each one of us, each one of us here at Kelvin Grove, each one who is listening elsewhere, and that you will help us to respond to this call, this command to put our trust in Jesus Christ as the only Savior and how we thank you again for sending him so that the penalty of our sin should be borne by him and we should be set free and forgiven and given the promise of eternal life.

we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.