

Holding nothing back (John 12)

Part 1

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Date	30.11.1974
Duration	00:36:37
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/mjo019/holding-nothing-back-john-12

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[00:00:00] ... a call by the evangelical company in this country.

What it means simply is, we believe that the Lord is going to take us before the tribulation bursts upon this world.

We believe that it has pleased God to call people in different ways down through the days of his dealings, and we believe that on this earth, where he was denied and crucified, the Son of God is going to reign supreme for a thousand years, a full answer to the reproach and shame of the Gospels.

And as I heard this remark, I said to him, well now, if I were to put a question to you, you'd be very hard-pressed to answer it without committing yourselves to the description [00:01:08] that you've given me.

And I put to him the amazing contrast between two men, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament, faced with dying.

The first one is Hezekiah.

Now if you read the account of Hezekiah, that occurs in both Kings and Chronicles, there was a man who from his earliest days was wholly committed to what he knew to be right in the light of the Word of God.

He went back to the Scriptures for his direction. And yet a man like Hezekiah, devoted as he was to Jehovah of his day, when faced with death, and Isaiah 38 gives us the account of it, put thy house in order, for thou shalt [00:02:05] die and not live a devotee of the Lord.

He was, remember me, his words were, Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. Remember me. Just to get within the circle of the favour of God.

And when the Lord answered him, the Lord didn't indicate that it would be on the very fringe of things, but right in the very centre he said, with me. The thief, instructed by prophetic outline, looked forward to something which would dawn in the future.

And let nobody persuade you that the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in a spiritual way today.

They're clearly not. And there is a day coming when the plain statements of the major and the minor prophets will find [00:03:04] their fulfilment, when Christ has his rightful place in this world, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

But it was perfectly acceptable for him to say, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom, something which was projected into the future. But when the Lord answered him, the Lord didn't say something in the future. He said today, something which was presently true. The third thing, of course, was the place.

And clearly, the prophecies of the Old Testament, and mind you, they're so heavily endorsed by the scriptures of the New Testament, make it clear that on this earth, when the Lord Jesus asserts his rights, the kingdom of God will be established. And the thief then said, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. [00:04:02] And the Lord said to him, it would not be only the kingdom with all its distinct blessing. It would be absolute paradise. Today, shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it made me feel again that nothing has been held back at all.

And that's the common thread that binds together the scriptures that we have read in the 14th, the 20th, and the 12th of John. The first two are distinct examples of things which are absolutely unique and distinct to the day in which we live, when the call of God is a heavenly calling. The last one, the 12th of John, faces us all with the sobering challenge of holding nothing back in response to what has reached us from God.

And so, living in this world, not loving our lives, but hating them for Christ and [00:05:04] being absolutely committed to him.

Just before we begin to look at them, one further remark. When you speak, or when we speak, of nothing being held back, you cannot go further, can you, than the person whose words we have read this afternoon, the case of the Son of God himself.

If you think of the parable, for example, in Matthew 13, or the parables of the treasure and the pearl that were hidden, he himself uses the words.

Stole all that he had.

And words like that take on a wonderfully distinct and touching character. When you think of the oft-repeated phrase which comes in the Pauline epistles, he gave himself.

And I think it's well worth lingering a while over the uniqueness and the distinction and [00:06:02] the glory of the person who has held nothing back, that you and I might rejoice in being able freely to address God as Father, knowing something of the indwelling and the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God, and knowing in our tiny measure what it is to be found. Being responsibly and wholeheartedly committed to the testimony of God in this world. I don't think we'll ever be able to measure the stoop that the Lord took when he came down into this world. I've often in my own mind thought of the difference between the words which he spoke from the glory, when in Exodus he said, I've seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt.

I've heard their cry, I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver.

[00:07:02] Now by observation and by perfect knowledge, he knew everything that the lash of the taskmaster and the toil of Egypt put upon that people. Ere by blood he sheltered them, and by power he delivered them out of the land of Egypt. But contrast that with one who felt, not by observation, but by passing through the very same experiences that the saints passed through, and it would take far more time than I have and far more ability than I have, to develop this theme which is taken up so closely and so wonderfully for the benefit of saints today as one of the early foundations in the epistle to the Hebrews.

The fact that the Lord Jesus has been down here in this world as a man, body, soul and [00:08:01] spirit, and has passed through by experience the very things which face you and me.

And now consequently the Hebrew epistle says, is able to meet every tried and tested saint of God.

But it wasn't merely the stoop from the throne to the glory that marked him.

I've often thought that where there are few scriptures about certain periods of the life of the Lord, how wonderfully full and powerful they have been. And I suppose there's no better example than the only words which are recorded of him from the time that he was found in Bethlehem's manger as a babe, until the time he embarks on his public ministry as the Gospels outline. Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business.

[00:09:01] What a comment on 30 hidden years in this world, where to a greater or a lesser degree, every man had pursued his own will.

And whilst for example you might get someone like David, of whom the comment in Acts 13 is, he served his own generation by the will of God.

If you read David's life, there were times when David swerved from the path of doing the will of God.

But for 30 hidden years in this world, the only word that we hear is this, wist ye not that I must be about my father's business. Nothing was held back.

And if we wanted a confirmation of that, the opened heavens and the father's voice heard on the banks of the Jordan were a witness that for the first time in this world, [00:10:04] there was a man completely after God's heart. One who had been sought was now found.

If you look at the interlinear or the Darby translation of those familiar words, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased, it refers back for it says, this is my beloved son in whom I have found my delight.

Now what was seen for the father's eye alone, in those years before he embarked upon his public ministry, was amply demonstrated throughout the time of his public manifestation in this world. Listen to his own word in John 6, as the living father has sent me and I live on account of the father. And on many occasions, the Lord was put into circumstances [00:11:01] where it simply entailed waiting upon the father's direction. In him there was nothing held back and I suppose the very part that we read from in John 14, had we carried on to the end of the chapter, is the most ample demonstration of it.

Most of the things that we fear never actually materialize.

I'm not very old, but I'm sure that those of you who are older will be able to endorse that, that the majority of the things that we fear either never come true, or the things that we view as mountains are less than molehills when eventually we do meet them. But you know, from the very beginning the Lord knew what was to come upon him. There was no question in the case of the Son of God of things being feared, that eventually would not materialize. [00:12:03] And if you think of the very atmosphere of the setting of John 14, Judas, the betrayer, having gone out, and you know, if you were betrayed by someone, the impact upon you could not be little, and yet all our senses to some degree or another are blunted by sin. What must it have been for the Lord whose senses were never blunted by sin, but perfectly and divinely attuned feeling the traitor and the betrayal which had taken place in the very circle of those that he'd gathered around himself. And consider the enmity of the Jews. The Lord elsewhere said, this is your hour and the power of darkness. And consider again that the very shadow of Calvary must have been resting upon the Lord's own spirit, when right at the end of John 14 he says these words, [00:13:05] that the world might know that I love the Father, and as the Father hath given me commandment, even so I do.

And if we were to go just that little further with him, and remember that prostrate on the ground before his Father he said, In the garden of Gethsemane when he went through in anticipation, all that in actuality he was to pass through on the cross, and he said, Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will, but thy will be done.

And I think in the clearest possible way they say, that as far as he is concerned, nothing has been held back. And it's upon him and upon his work that the other scriptures, [00:14:02] that we're going to comment on, rest.

In John 20, the scene is the most moving one where we commence to read, Mary Magdalene's life had crumbled about her when the Lord was crucified. I've often put to myself the question, would my life crumble as Mary Magdalene's life crumbled, when the Son of God was crucified? And it's clear from the words that we did read, that to her even the body of the Lord Jesus was precious.

In life he had meant everything, and to her in death even his body was precious. And I can't help but think that it's with good reason, that it was to a woman like that, who found her everything in the Son of God, that the Lord spoke words, [00:15:02] which I think can be said with good reason, are the most amazing words that were ever spoken to human ears. And how happy an example of the tribe of Naphtali, Mary of Magdala is, in that one out of whom seven devils were cast, was to carry to the apostolic company, a message which had never reached human ears before. Of Naphtali he says, a hind let loose, he giveth goodly words.

And I read to you those words.

Mary evidently, one word from the Lord, got home to her heart, and how sweet an example of the Lord's own words, my sheep hear my voice.

And she obviously went to touch the Lord, she moved towards him to embrace him. And he said, touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my father, [00:16:03] but go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my father and your father, to my God and your God.

Now, I believe when the Lord said to Mary, touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my father, that he was saying to Mary, Mary, don't take me up on the ground only, of prophetic promise and foretold glory, and I wouldn't wish for one moment to diminish that at all. In fact, there's that amazing statement in the first chapter of 2nd Peter, that says, that when the Lord was glorified in regal glory, on the Mount of Transfiguration, it makes the prophetic word even more sure, that in the world where he was denied and ultimately crucified, [00:17:01] he will be glorified and adored.

And the whole creation will be responsive with his praise. But I believe the Lord was saying to Mary, Mary, there's something even beyond the glory of that coming kingdom, when I have my rightful place. Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my father, but go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my father and your father, and unto my God and your God.

Now, I think it's fairly well known and can be briefly touched upon, that it has pleased God down through the days, to make himself known in particular ways. And if I remind you that in the book of Genesis, to Abraham, he made himself known as the Almighty, the all-sufficient God. You remember, I am the Almighty God. [00:18:02] Walk thou before me and be thou perfect. And it's pretty clear from the kind of excavations, that have gone on in Ur of the Chaldees, over the past, say, ten years, that when we were told some years ago, that Abraham was a Bedouin-like Arab, nothing could be further from the truth. And it only enhances the impact, that the appearance of the God of glory made on Abraham, that it was sufficient to draw him out of an advanced civilization, where, for example, they had things like air conditioning in their houses. It was sufficient to draw him out of an advanced civilization, and to endure the existence of a tent, with not so much of that land of promise to call his own, but in prospect he had it all. And God made himself known there as the Almighty God. [00:19:01] It pleased him later to make himself known as the covenant-keeping Jehovah, to the children of Israel. Heir by blood, he sheltered them in Egypt, and by power delivered them out of the land of bondage, and set them on the path to the land that flowed with milk and honey. But even in making himself known in that way, it's clearly intimated that there was something more to come. Because you remember when Moses said, show me thy glory, and he was put into the cleft of the rock, and the hand of the Lord was put over him, and his glory passed by. Moses witnessed the back parts, the face, face to face had not been seen. But oh, when the Son of God stepped into this world, it was all out, it was fully known. And had I read to you a little earlier in John 14, [00:20:02] we would have read the words, he that has seen me has seen the Father. God now not only made known in his attributes of power, or made known in his character as holy, righteous and true, but now made known in the light of eternal relationships, and the love which is proper to them. And it's in the light of that, that the Lord says to Mary, go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father.

And even the youngest believer here this afternoon, by virtue of the indwelling of the spirit of adoption, is able to enjoy and to do something, that not even Moses, or Abraham, or if we use the words of the Lord himself, John the Baptist as the greatest of the prophets, was able to enjoy something which was absolutely unique. [00:21:05] I think there is one thing which is worth saying about this though, that the Lord didn't quite say, go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto our Father.

He said unto my Father and your Father. And I think we'd all gladly own, that there is that which is in him, absolutely unique by his grace.

The spirit of sonship gives us to cry Abba Father. But there is ever, and will only be ever, one only

begotten Son.

And I think we would gladly bow before him, and acknowledge that which is absolutely unique. My Father and your Father, my God and your God.

In John chapter 14, the Lord speaks for the first time, about the coming and the indwelling, [00:22:03] and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And I think the words that we've read together, are well worth paying attention to.

Having spoken to numbers of individual believers, in the course of my work, who are connected with the charismatic movement, I would say very humbly, that the plain statements of scripture, are to be received and acted upon, experience at its best, is not our guide.

The word of God is our guide. And with that as our basis, there will be right experiences before God. And for the first time, in these chapters that we speak of as the last words, the Lord Jesus speaks of the coming comforter, and his ministry.

I will pray the Father, and he will give you another comforter, [00:23:01] that he may be with you forever, even the spirit of truth.

Now there are two things which are worth saying about this. The first is this, I will give you another comforter.

Now you may on many occasions have sung a hymn, which closes with the last line, I can't remember the first words at the moment. Oh to be with him then, and to look back, and to think of what it must have been like with the Lord, in the days, when he manifested his divine power here on earth. And you know I've often thought that even in 1975, with all our boastings about what men can do, if we were to have seen done here and now, the things which he did then, for example calling the dead to life, even the kind of world in which we live, would sit up and take note.

But you know our position, and it's the Lord's own words that say it, is even more blessed, [00:24:01] and more unique than theirs was.

I will give you another comforter. Now I think it's beyond gain saying, that the Lord was stating in the plainest possible way, that the position of the child of God today, would be even more advantageous, than that of those that he had gathered round him, and called his own then. Because there would be two comforters. You know the Lord has not gone on high, and has stopped the kind of ministry, of care and of sustaining, that he carried on for his own when he was here, in the days of his flesh. No, if you were to read Romans 8, in fact in a couple of verses, round about verses 28 and 29, you get a statement, which throws light on the Lord's words here, another comforter, because you get the words, we know not what to pray for as we ought, [00:25:03] but the spirit that makes intercession, and then later it says, he that searches the hearts, knows what is the mind of God, for he intercedes for saints according to God.

Ours is a blessed and unique position, in as much as we have the Lord living for us up there. But he said, that the Holy Spirit of God would be to us, what he had been to the apostolic company, in his days down here. And if you follow his tender ministry of encouragement, his guidance and his protection, and his patient waiting upon them, in all their misunderstandings and their failings. And

the Lord said, another comforter, that he may be with you forever.

Now we may not constantly enjoy, the unhindered, unfettered ministry, [00:26:01] of the Holy Spirit of God in our souls, but one thing, which is plainly impossible for the child of God to say today, in contrast with the cry of David, they can never say, take not thy Holy Spirit from me, for the Lord said, that he may be with you forever.

Even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it knows him not, nor sees him, but ye know him.

And then these other words, which I think are well worth lingering on, he is with you and shall be in you.

Those words, he is with you and shall be in you, actually are a hinge for a change of dispensation. The very fact, that those had responded to the ministry of the Lord, and had been able to pierce through the veil and see him as he was, were evidence of the fact, that the Holy Spirit of God had worked upon their hearts. [00:27:03] They knew him, the Lord said, ye know him, for he is with you. And then he added the words, and shall be in you.

Now this is absolutely unique, and many a time I sit down and think about its sobering impact, that in each one of us individually, and in dwelling the assembly as the Holy Spirit of God, and aligning it with a verse a little later down, it seems, well certainly as far as I'm concerned, you touch on something which is beyond exposition, and is really for enjoyment here in this world. The hallmark of the day in which we live, the fact that God has held nothing back, is witnessed by this, that in dwelling each one of us, and from the very moment faith in God's dear Son was sealed, [00:28:02] is the Holy Spirit of God, with all his omnipotence, and with all his ministry, and with all that belongs to him as being overall God.

Just a little later, I think about verse 17 or 18, we have these words, In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

Now to some extent we all are deficient in knowledge of things, it ever must be, mustn't it? I recently read in a magazine, the obituary notice of a very faithful servant of God, I would suppose, and many comments about his usefulness, and his faithfulness were given.

But there was one there which I took exception to, because one of his past students, [00:29:02] who had sat at his feet for many years, said that he would never forget listening to him, and he used these words, Milking the word of God dry.

Now I took exception to that, the word of God is as infinite as its giver, and never will anyone be able to do that at all. And therefore to some degree or other down here, there always will be a deficiency of knowledge. But you know, you take the youngest believer, in this company this afternoon, and the sweetness and the blessedness of those words, In that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you, would be absolutely open to them. You ask where the Son of God is, they would tell you where he is. He's a man in the glory. You ask them what their acceptance is, before the Father's face, and they would tell you that they're in him. And when you raise with them, [00:30:02] the question of testimony in this world, they would be able to tell you, in the simplest way, that it's a question of Christ shining out in them. And the Lord said, In that day ye shall know that I am in my

Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

Just two comments before I finish.

It's in the setting of responding to the Word of God, that the Lord Jesus raises this issue of the ministry, and indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. And I think it's good for us to face the sobering challenge of it. Obedience is the proof of love, and love is the spring of obedience. And the words of the Scripture are these, If ye love me, keep my commandments.

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, [00:31:01] he it is that loveth me.

And if a man love me, he will keep my words.

Now, very often amongst young people, matters about wearing hats are raised.

Why the hair of young men, or of men, should be short, and women should be long. I'd humbly say that these are not matters of opinion, brethren. These are plain statements of the Word of God, and the Lord says to each one of us, If ye love me, keep my commandments.

Matters like the breaking of bread, going on to more serious and fundamental issues. They're all simple matters of plain stated obedience, to the easily understood Word of the Lord. And in a world which is increasingly lawless and contrary, the Lord Jesus says to every one of us this afternoon, [00:32:02] If ye love me, keep my commandments.

And if as a young man I might pass on a word of exhortation to all you who are younger, remembering that some years ago, a brother who has now reached his rest said to me, Do all your reading of the Word of God, and books of ministry before you're married. The Lord says, He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. You know, young people, seep yourselves in the Word of God. I know you'll get the brethren saying it's all up here, and it's not in here. But if it's not up here, it never stands a chance of getting into here. You lay hold upon these scriptures, store your mind with them, and then earnestly pray that the Lord would make the things that you know in your mind, good in your heart, and it will give you the grace to live here for Christ in this world. [00:33:02] And that's why I read the verses in the 12th of John.

From God's side, nothing has been held back.

And the Lord raises the sobering challenge for each one of us on our part, of holding nothing back in our service for Him. You can't avoid the plain meaning of His words. He that loveth his life, shall lose it.

He that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal. And mark you, it was said on the very occasion when the Lord was reminded of what the path was for Him, the Greeks had said to Philip, wasn't it?

Sirs, we would see Jesus.

And the Lord looked on to that day when not merely the assembly today or the nation of Israel would bask in the beneficence of His sway, [00:34:01] but the very ends of the earth would taste it. And the

Greeks, the Hellenists, the Gentiles, reminded the Lord that there was only one way for that to be reached. And He said, except a corn of wheat falling to the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. And it's consequent upon that that the Lord says, he that loveth his life in this world, shall lose it. He that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal.

Now, I think that the word is eminently clear, isn't it? It is possible to live in this world with your own desires and our own selfish desires governing us, even as believers. But it is possible, and to this end was the relationship unfolded. And to this end was the Holy Spirit of God given, that we might be found living in this world, hating our lives with this assurance, [00:35:04] that we will keep it unto life eternal.

And it's consequent upon this that the Lord says, if any man serve me, let him come after me.

And where I am, there also shall my servant be.

You know, God doesn't ask any one of us to do in response what He's not prepared to do Himself. And if the word of the Lord makes its impact upon our hearts and touches us, count upon this, that we're moving into the path of following one who himself held nothing back and he said, as the living Father has sent me, and I live on account of the Father, even so he that eateth me, shall live on account of me. Now, it has been fulfilled that in a man of like passions, in this world, this very thing was seen. There was one man who said, a man of like passions, [00:36:03] for me to live, Christ.

Oh, may God so touch our hearts with the grace which has reached us and the fact that on His side nothing has been held back, that upon our part, whilst we wait for His coming, we might count it an honour to be found wholeheartedly, committed to the service of Christ, assured that the day will come when, as the Lord says, if any man serve me, him also will my Father honour.