

# The Lost Art of Expression

The Gospels

Matthew 3

## Introduction

We live in a world of communication. Without a doubt, the communicative skills of businesses are exceeding the expectations of many. In this day, we can communicate with people around the world like never before. It is a day in which our vocabulary is increasing; in fact, there are statistics, rather unusually, pointing to the fact that there are words added to our vocabulary all the time. Yet, we are expressing ourselves less and less – we are losing the art of expression.

Today, we will study an incredible commentary on the way we are to express our feelings to one another. Although we may communicate on the corporate or informational level, we are losing the ability to communicate on the emotional or feeling level. We are about to see an incredible passage of scripture in which God communicates to His Son on the level of feelings. What a commentary it is!

## The Baptism of Jesus

Turn to Matthew chapter 3, which opens with the baptism of Jesus Christ. Let me give four reasons, in the setting of the things that occurred when Jesus was baptized, as to why He was baptized.

### 1. First, it was a moment of declaration.

John the Baptist, when he saw Jesus Christ coming, said, in John 1:29b,

*... "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

This was the public announcement that Jesus Christ, the Lamb, was here and had a purpose to fulfill. It was an awesome moment of declaration, yet much more.

### 2. Secondly, it was a moment of identification.

Matthew 3:13-15, tells us,

*Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.*

*But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"*

*But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.*

Jesus was identifying with the program of God for that day. He was identifying with the true prophet of God at that moment. He was also identifying with the repentant people of God as they came to the Jordan River to be baptized – immersing themselves, with the aid of John, in the muddy water and confessing their sins.

Now Jesus was not being baptized because He was a sinner who had need of confession, He was being baptized in order to identify with those who had sinned. He was, in a sense, identifying with the people for whom He had come to die, while they were in their sinful state.

### 3. Thirdly, it was a moment of anointing.

Look at Matthew 3:16,

*After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and lighting on Him,*

As Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit of God came and anointed Him in the figure of a beautiful dove.

### 4. Fourthly, it was a moment of approval.

In Matthew 3:17, we read,

*and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*

This moment of approval is the topic we will focus our attention on today.

## The Blessing of Jesus

Let us divide Matthew 3:17b into three expressions. In the original, this could be translated

several different ways. Let me give three different thoughts for these expressions.

**1. First, there is an expression of acceptance.**

In the first phrase of Matthew 3:17b, God says,  
... *“This is My . . . Son, . . .”*

Then, in a parenthetical statement, He adds, “The One I love, in whom I am well-pleased.” This first statement is an expression of acceptance.

Now, when the words, “This is My Son,” were heard, how do you think Jesus Christ felt at that moment in time? Let us emphasize His humanity today. We know He is all God, but we are going to emphasize the fact that He was also all human. He is the Son and, as this verse records, He is hearing His perfect Father say, “This is *My Son . . .*”. Bound in that phrase is the thought and expression of total acceptance.

How do you think Jesus felt? His chest probably grew an inch, just like your chest did when your father introduced you to someone, “This is my daughter,” or, “This is my son.” It is one thing for a father to acknowledge you to himself, but it is another altogether for him to do so in public.

In this scene, there were several thousand people there. The people were flooding in to be baptized by John. Then, a voice comes from the heavens. Jesus knew He was being introduced as the Son of God – as someone important.

Acceptance is unconditional. It should be in the physical family as well as in the spiritual family. The word acceptance should be part of our expression and our vocabulary.

What was Jesus like at this time? He was somewhat unimpressive; obscure. He was a carpenter and there were no miracles yet. However, His Father says,

... *“This is My . . . Son, . . .”*

“I accept Him just like He is.”

God was telling the Son, “I claim You; You belong to Me.”

God was telling the world, “This is *My Son.*”

It was as if He was saying, “Don’t ever forget it.”

Now if God would give the second Person of the Trinity this statement of identity, “The Perfect Son,” how much more should you and I give our children and our spiritual family this statement of identity –

that there is total acceptance. If Jesus had a need to hear that, how much more would we?

A child is born, I have read, with one question, which I think I have seen proven. It is the question, “Who am I?” They also have the question, “How much do I mean to you?”

There are several things that I have read and know to be true, that we, as physical parents, can use to get around answering these questions.

An individual can say, “Well, I may not share verbal expressions of acceptance, but at least I don’t yell at them or cut them down.”

Ladies and gentlemen, the negative does not necessarily become interpreted in the positive. It does not necessarily follow that simply by the absence of negative statements, the child or the spiritual family member translates it as a statement of acceptance. It does not work that way.

Another one is, “Well, I come home from work and I am there with them. Shouldn’t that say something?”

It does – it says volumes. However, it does not verbally express acceptance to those individuals.

Dr. Dobson clearly and honestly argues that the admiration and acceptance of others by most Americans is built around two things – beauty and intelligence.

We know this is true, right? Our attraction and acceptance of others is based on beauty, physical appearance, and intelligence. We ask questions such as, “What do they look like?” or, “What are your grades?” This is basically the foundation for our expressions of acceptance. If the person “fits the bill,” then they know we accept them.

What of those who do not “fit the bill,” however? I read a rather bizarre story that unfolded in a park in New York City. A sixteen-year-old boy took out a butcher knife and went over to an older man who was sitting on a bench reading a newspaper, and stabbed him 130 times. The police finally arrived, arrested that young man, and hauled him down to the police station. For a long time, he would not speak.

Finally, one of the police officers said, “Who was that man?”

The sixteen-year-old said, “I don’t know.”

“Well, what did he do to you?”

“Nothing.”

“You mean, you went up to someone that you do not know; a total stranger who didn’t say anything to you or do anything to you, and killed him?!”

They were in total disbelief of this story that unfolded right before their eyes. The young man finally decided to speak, saying, “You want to know why? I’ll tell you why. I’ve got an older brother. He’s very smart; very intelligent. He’s also extremely athletic and good-looking. He’s talented. He’s everything that I’m not. All my life, I’ve heard my mother say, ‘Your brother is going to be famous. Why can’t you be famous like him?’”

He continued, saying, “I knew that I would never be famous because of my intelligence or my athletic ability or my looks, so I thought of the worst possible thing I could do and I went out and did it. Maybe, my mother will remember me now.”

A believer enters the church with the same identity crises. He comes into the spiritual world with one question, “Who am I and how much do I mean to you?”

We, as his spiritual family, give an answer. The effective church says, “Accepted, just like you are.” The effective parent says, “Accepted, just like you are.”

Turn to I Corinthians 6:9-10, which gives a rather sordid list of individuals. It refers to people like the fornicator, the idolater, the adulterer, the effeminate, the homosexual, the thief, the covetous, the drunkard, the reviler, the swindler. Then Paul says to that church,

*Such were some of you . . .*

Imagine that! Think of it – a former idolater on the worship committee. Think of it – a former swindler as the treasurer of the church. This was a church that obviously had one word stamped over the front door, “accepted”.

Jesus Christ heard His Father say a volume when He said,

*. . . “This is My . . . Son . . .”*

Note in Paul’s writings in I Corinthians, the common use of the word, “brethren”. It is a term of endearment. It is a family name.

Lucian, an unbelieving Greek who lived during the first century, wrote these words of the early church, “It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other. They spare

nothing. Jesus put it into their heads that they are brethren.”

The word “brethren,” was not used in that day, but it was used in the church. Lucian was saying, “They’ve got this idea that they’re related to each other. I can’t figure them out.”

There was an incredible expression of acceptance then.

## **2. Secondly, there is an expression of affection.**

Look at the first phrase in Matthew 3:17b again.

*. . . “This is My beloved Son, . . .”*

God says, “This is My Son,” and then adds the editorial word, “agapetos,” meaning, “the One I love; the One who is dearly loved by Me.” This, which is usually translated “beloved,” is an expression of affection in its deepest sense.

Paul illustrates the same thing in the early church. To the same church, in I Corinthians 1:4a, he says,

*I thank my God always concerning you . . .*

Paul later ends this letter by saying, in I Corinthians 16:24,

*My love be with you all . . .*

Now this is a church that really did not deserve Paul’s love and appreciation. He constantly had to discipline and write to them, in order to straighten problems out. Yet, he says, “I want you to know, I love you. Don’t assume it, know it. You don’t have to guess. You can read it. I want you to hear it.”

Ladies and gentlemen, true affection or love like this is not based upon the worth of the recipient – it is based upon the willful, conscious decision of the dispenser. It is not based upon whether or not the individual, who is receiving the “agape,” or the love, deserves it – it is based upon the will of the person giving it.

There is another word, by the way, translated typically in relationship with the family, which is the word, “stergo”. This was a term of great affection that was used between husband and wife as well as between parent and child.

God does not use “stergo,” He uses that cold, unfeeling word that spoke volumes, “agape”. This was not based upon emotion – it was based upon decision; it was based upon will. It was never based upon the object – it was based upon the character of the one giving it.

Turn to I Thessalonians 2:7-8 and note the apostle Paul's words of great affection, as he writes,

***But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.***

***Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.***

Notice the context from which he illustrates his love. It is the context of the nursing mother. Paul refers to these people as the smallest, youngest infant.

Now this is a man talking. Most men do not think in terms of this kind of affection. Can you imagine, fellows, writing someone a letter and talking about how dear they are to you? We simply do not talk like this, "I have a fond affection for you."

However, it is more amazing that the infant is referred to that, at least in my mind, is obviously a helpless person. I had absolutely no experience in this area until it landed on our doorstep. However, when we take a little baby from a woman's arms, men, what is the first thing she tells you? Always, until you get the hang of it, she says, "Watch out for the head." It is as if the head is not connected yet. We are not very good with that kind of thing. Infants are very helpless and Paul refers to the Corinthians like that.

An infant is typically unattractive, as well. Now I am not talking about babies born to our church families – they are very beautiful – but everyone else's is very unattractive. Maybe I am being too realistic, but when our twin boys were born, it was a fact. One looked like a prune for months and the other looked like his brother had sat on him because his face was turned sideways – his nose was to the side; everything was crooked. I was changing that boy's diaper and I said, "Honey, this kid's ugly."

Most mothers would have a problem with this, but she said, "I know it."

What would make it even worse was when someone would say, "My, they look just like their daddy, don't they?"

This is a complement now, but not then.

Do not forget the person writing these verses with such tender affection is a man who endured hardship. Paul refers to himself as a soldier. He was beaten, imprisoned, stoned, and shipwrecked. He was tough. Yet, Paul says, "I . . ."

***. . . proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.***

***Having so fond an affection for you, . . . you had become very dear to us.***

How did the recipients of these words respond? If you think these words are a little mushy, hang onto your hat! Turn to the book of Acts.

Paul is telling the elders; the leaders of the church at Ephesus, "Goodbye." They will probably never see him again. He warns them, in a terrific sermon in this chapter, of all the things that they should watch out for. He is concerned about their wellbeing. Then, they go down to the ship. Look at Acts 20:36-37.

***When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.***

***And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,***

In other words, their love was expressed.

I see a group of *men* there. The elders and Paul are hugging each other, and crying, and kissing. We have come a long way from that, haven't we?

Affection like that, by the way, is learned. It is learned by observing transparent people. It is seen in the home between a mom and a dad. It is learned, so do not hold back.

My wife and I are having a tough time with this at the moment because our kids, at ages five and three, have reached the point in their lives that any kind of affection is a little weird between Mom and Dad. This week has been rough. I do not know how many of you have a five year old, but it is a little ridiculous – maybe you can give us some insight. We are feeling like we need to steal out to the garage to catch a kiss because the kids come around the corner!

Two days ago, one of them comes scooting around when I was kissing his mom in the kitchen. He lets out a big, "Oooh!"

This has a way of destroying the moment! The other two come and stand there saying, "Oooh!"

This morning I was kissing their mom as I was leaving, and our three-year-old girl rolls her eyes and says, "Gross."

Frankly, as far as she is concerned, I hope she keeps that attitude for the next eighteen years!

It is the showering of affection; it is the expression of affection that reveals there is true "agape," or love.

My family is going to go to my parent's home this week for Thanksgiving. I love walking through that front door. I hope I never outgrow it and do not plan to, but at thirty-two years old, I will walk over to my father and we will put our arms around each other and give each other a kiss. I can come back with my batteries charged and ready to go because there has been that expression.

When was the last time you expressed your love to another believer or to a relative – to a parent or to a child? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10.

### 3. **Thirdly, there is an expression of admiration.**

Look at Matthew 3:17b again.

... *“This is My . . . Son, . . .”*

This is the expression of acceptance.

... *“This is My beloved Son, . . .”*

In other words, “This is the One I dearly love.” This is the expression of affection.

Then, in the last phrase, we read,

... *“. . . in whom I am well-pleased.”*

We could translate this, “In whom I am delighted.” This is the expression of admiration.

What did God have to be so proud of? His Son had not entered the ministry; had not done one thing for the kingdom yet. He had accomplished the ability to work with wood.

However, who was Jesus at this point? He was emerging. His Father says, “I am delighted with this boy – My Son.”

The more I looked at this, the more I kind of scratched my head and thought, “Now, wait a second. I show admiration to someone after they have done something to deserve it.”

However, I do not show admiration for who they are.

This is the thing I am missing. Admiration should be expressed independently of achievement. It is geared toward who the person is. They may simply be related to you.

Dr. Nick Stinnett, chairman of the Department of Human Development at the University of Nebraska, studied 3,000 families and came up with six qualities that made them strong. He is an unbeliever and was probably surveying unbelieving families. However, he found that the families who were the strongest had the element of admiration; the expression of admiration,

one to another, for who they were and not just for what they did.

I like the story of Diane, who had heard, in words, the expressions of admiration from her parents. Her parents told her of their excitement in the delivery room, which turned to immediate concern as their little baby girl was born with her left arm undeveloped. There was a stub, instead of a full arm, reaching only to her elbow. As this mother and father were nestling Diane in their arms in the recovery room, they made a conscious decision to let her know that she was highly valued, regardless of her arm.

I read an interview of Diane when she was a twenty-year-old college student. She talks about the obstacles in her life. There were stares and giggles and tactless questions from her peers, as well as from older people. Yet, she said the thing that kept her going was the precious and powerful gift from her parents – the security of knowing that she was highly valued.

She said these words,

*My parents didn't try to hide from me the fact that I was different. They've been very realistic with me. But I always knew, as they have told me over and over again, that I am their greatest claim to fame. Whether I was trying out for the softball team, learning how to play the piano with one hand, or learning how to drive with my dad as the teacher, they have been my biggest fans. They have prayed for me and always thought the best.*

How different Diane's story is from another little eight-year-old girl who wrote to a well-known counselor that works primarily with young people. This young girl wrote,

*Can you help me? My father carries a picture around of my younger brother, who is four and looks just like Daddy. He also carries a picture of my older sister, who is fifteen and is very pretty. My daddy doesn't carry my picture around at all. I gave him a picture of me. I cut it out and I made sure it would fit in his wallet, but he put it in a drawer. Is there any way I can get my daddy to carry my picture?*

## Conclusion

On the eve of Jesus Christ's ministry, His Father said:

- . . . “*This is My . . . Son, . . .*” – I express acceptance of Him.
- . . . *This is My beloved Son, . . .*” – or “This is the One I dearly love” – I express affection for Him.
- . . . “*. . . in whom I am well-pleased.*” – I express admiration for Him.

These expressions need to be in the home. Do not assume it is being heard unless you are saying it.

These expressions need to be in the church. Do not expect it to ever be said unless you and I say it.