

Gotta Serve Somebody

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, thank you so much that you know our frailties, you know our strengths, you know our sin, you know the great virtues that can be accomplished in us, you know our ugliness, you know our beauty. Thank you, Father, that you know us perfectly, completely, deeply, thoroughly from the moment of our conception to what is for us our future, which is our moment of death. Father, we give you thanks and praise, you know the length and breadth and depth of our lives, and still you love us, still you loved us, and sent your Son to die upon the cross for us.

Father, grant us a great confidence in your love for us, shown in Jesus in his death for us, so that as we hear your words of Scripture, rather than, Father, being off put by them, it'll help us, Father, to see once again how wonderful and beautiful he is. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Saviour. Amen. Please be seated.

So, why is it so hard to change for the better? It doesn't seem to be very hard to change for the worst. It seems very easy to no longer follow your diet, and I know partially that is because, frankly, chocolate and potato chips are very, very tasty, and sitting on a couch is always attractive compared to, let's say, going out for a run. But in all sorts of areas of our lives, why is it that we keep going back to things that are wrong and things that wreck our lives?

Like, why is it that if we've been struggling with lack of forgiveness, and we think we've finally gotten over it, and then we go back to a season of holding on to griefs and hurts, why is it that if we finally start to try to get some control over our finances that we feel the need to binge and use our credit cards and go back into some type of financial distress? Like, why is it that we keep going back and doing things that are wrong and things that hurt us and ruin us? The Bible text that Jono read, and he just read part of it, we're going to look at the bigger part of it, it's not the part that Jono read so much, but if you go on down and it talks about God's judgment and people being given under the hands of their enemies and all of that, it's on one hand, for many people, if they were to read all of Nehemiah 9, it would be exhibit A as to why Christianity is all screwed up and you shouldn't have anything to do with it, but actually, if you persist and pay attention, it actually opens a window to understand why we keep going back to do the things that are wrong and ruin us, and also it points to hope, hope to change, to not always ruin yourself, ruin myself. So it'd be a great help if you turn in your Bibles, and let's look at the text, it's Nehemiah chapter 9, and we've been preaching through the book of Nehemiah, and that's, we've come to this part here, and just by the way, just so you know, one of the funny things, if you study commentary, you read commentaries like I do,

I start to look at a passage and I think, oh, you know, blah, blah, blah, just a passage, and then I read a commentary and I discover there's pages devoted to something that looks innocuous, and this first verse is actually one of those verses that just looks innocuous, but actually causes lots of controversy amongst people, and here's what Nehemiah 9, 1 does, it says this, now on the 24th day of the month, the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth and with earth on their heads. Now, why on earth is that controversial? Well, the controversy comes if you look at the context, because Nehemiah is a book, and so it has a beginning, it has an end, and stuff in between, and what's just happened before this is the people of Israel have gathered to hear God's word, and as God's word was heard and explained to them, they started to realize that they had done wrong, and they started to feel convicted and grieved the wrongdoing that they'd done, and we've all had that type of experience. We come to realize that maybe something we've done in the past, or just last week or a week ago, that we didn't think was wrong, all of a sudden we realize how it's hurt us, how it was a bad thing, and it hurt people, and it hurt ourselves, and hurt God, and we feel bad about it, and so, but then they're encouraged to say, this is not a day of grieving, because you're coming into the presence of God, and the joy of the Lord is our strength, and so they're led into rejoicing, they have a feast, they're to share their extras, sort of make sure everybody has like a feast with lots of fat and lots of wine, in other words, like lots of ice cream with whipped cream, and really juicy steaks, and lots of butter on the potatoes, and lots of wine, and then they go into a period of seven days of feasting, as they remember God's act to deliver them, and to provide for them, and that all happens, let's say that all ends on Saturday, and now the next part of the chapter comes, and it's no longer Saturday, but now it's Monday, and on Monday, they're all fasting. Well, I've shared that with a couple of people, and they all say, well, that's the wrong order. Ah, you see, there's the problem. People say it's the wrong order.

[5 : 39] Like, how can we explain this? How can we explain that the Bible has this wrong order? Like, the biblical order is you fast and repent of your sin, and then you celebrate and feast, and this has the completely wrong order. You're, you know, feasting and celebrating, and then you immediately go into, almost immediately go into a fast, and then, you know, scholars say, oh, you know, well, maybe chapter nine should have been over here, and this should have been over there, and they come up. Listen, listen, that's life, isn't it? Like, how many of us have a great moment with God? Maybe we've had a Sunday morning where you just really feel the Spirit and the presence of God, and you just really feel God's close to you, and you just feel really excited, and you're just, you're almost like on a high, and you celebrate afterwards, and then the next day, you feel unbelievably crappy, or like the next day, you know, you snipe at your wife, you snipe at your boss, you share slander, you overspend on your credit. Like, that's life. Life doesn't go in some type of, like, order like that. To my mind, it's like, just get over it. Like, that's life. It's one of the things that's so wonderful about the Bible is that the Bible describes real life. It's one of the things that constantly causes people problems.

When I was in Calgary, I got to spend some time with my, some of my grandsons, and they were, I think, like, one of them's like seven and five, or something like that, and they were watching a cartoon, like, appropriate for a seven-year-old, I don't know, with monsters that wrestle, and one guy, you know, anyway, it's so funny to watch it with them, because, you know, to me, it's just so predictable, right? They're going to look, it looks like they're going to lose, and everything's going to go bad, and, of course, they're going to happy, they're going to have a happy ending, and all that, but they're so into it. Like, one of my grandsons, he found it so tense, he had to leave the room. He hasn't figured out yet. It's all just very formulaic, but the problem is we want, we want the Bible to be like a cartoon and formulaic, but in fact, it just describes the real world. In the real world, you can have a time that's really great with God, and you're feasting, and then before you know it, you need to repent.

It's just real life. Now, the next part also causes all sorts of controversy as well, believe it or not, but for a different reason. Look what happens next. It says this in verse 2, and the Israelites, the Jewish people, separated themselves from all foreigners, from all who are outside of the Jewish faith. They separate themselves. They're all, remember, they're all gathered. They're in fasting, and they're in sackcloth, oops, and ashes. Sorry to those online in particular. I just, I shouldn't have done that, but anyway. Sometimes I just forget the mics there, which is a good thing. Anyway, so they're separated, and they stood, and they confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers and their mothers, their ancestors. Now, here's the problem with the text, is it gets people bent out of shape, is this idea of separation, that they're separating from the outsiders, but here's the thing to understand. It's, we're not, we're not hearing it right. What they're about to do is have a time where they are reminded of the reality of the triune, well, they don't know it's the triune God, but we do, the reality of God, how great he is, and how needy and broken and constantly sinning they are.

That's what they're going to gather to remember. They're going to spend their time focusing on the greatness of God, and on, in a sense, their unworthiness, and God's great kindness to them.

Now, it's not like, and I'm not, I'm going to use, it's not like having a Republican or a Democratic Party convention where it's all raw, raw, raw, raw, we're the greatest, everybody else sucks, and, and at the end of the day, you walk away pumped and filled with pride. This is the opposite of that. This is a time that ends up humbling you, and rather than making you look down your nose at other people, it makes you look at other people and notice the world in, in a way that's going to actually be filled with compassion. So, it's not a bad thing that they've separated, and on one level, they're just doing what we do on a Sunday morning, which we gather together, in a sense, we've separated from the world, to come together to hear God, hear about God and his greatness and our, our, our great needs. So, it's not a bad thing. It's not a raw, raw, raw time, we're great, thumping our chest. No, no, it's a time of God is great, and we have a great need. You know, when you're looking, you can't look up to God and look down your nose at people at the same time.

[10:22] You can't look up to God and look down your nose at people at the same time. And so, the more we are trained to look up to God, it's not that people disappear, but that we won't look down our noses at them, because we're looking up to God. So, what are they doing? Well, verses three to five describe sort of what they're going to do, and it, it goes like this.

And they stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, for three hours. For another quarter, another, for another three hours, they made confession and worshiped their God. And then it says, and I'm not going to try to reread the names that Jono did. I, I, they sounded great to me. I don't know whether you pronounce them correctly or not. I, I was just talking to a Jewish woman, uh, the other day at the coffee shop, and I, I said, uh, I used the word Tanakh, and she said, no, no, no, no, that's not how you say it. I said, it's not?

She said, no, Tanakh. She really emphasized the sound. So, I have no idea whether Jono pronounced the names correctly, but it sounded good to me. But there's a whole list of names, and then if you jump down to, um, to verse five, uh, we come to the prayer. Remember I said how they're gathering to look up to God, uh, and here we see the summary of all their worship. Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. And that sort of summarizes all of their worship, looking up to God who's high and mighty and transcendent. But now what follows, and I'm not going to read the whole thing because it's, it's very long, uh, but what follows now is 31 verses of, in the proper Christian sense of the word, confession. We, uh, they confess the greatness of God, and they confess their sin and their need.

And we're going to, it's a 31 verse prayer. And, uh, I'm just going to read the first part of it, and then we're going to come to this very tragic and thought-provoking but. So, here's what they do.

They begin by saying, you are the Lord, verse six, you are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth and all that is on it, the sea and all that is in them. And you preserve all of them, and the host of heaven worships you. Now, just pause for a second here. This little bit that doesn't seem like it's very important, affirming how God has created and preserves all things, is actually very, very, very important to understanding the prayer. And part of the reason we sometimes don't understand the Bible right is we forget the way it's ordered. By the time we get to the end, we forget, in a sense, the basis on which it's standing to help to understand. So, we're going to, I'm going to hopefully return to it, but it's actually really important.

[13 : 38] The reason it's important is that one of the things that people fear about God, the true God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, three persons, one God forever and ever.

One of the worries that we have is that God, in a sense, is like a totalitarian God who obliterates everything and only wants us to worship him, and that he'll get in the way of us having relationships or making money or getting promotions. And we worry that God will be all-consuming.

And ironically, when we think that about God, what we're really worrying about are idols and demons. That's actually what we're worried about. We've misunderstood that the triune God is the complete opposite of an idol and the complete opposite of a demon. And that's why this text is really important to show that God isn't going to annihilate normal human interests, but instead is going to help us to know how to fulfill them wisely. Anyway, what continues? So then he moves. He goes from creation to verse 7. There's a big jump in period. They remember now. And by the way, one of the things which is so powerful, if I was to show you, I started to notice something when I was reading it.

And you probably can't see it, but if you see all the pink there at all, vaguely, that's every time the word you or your is used in the text. This is a text directed directly to God. You, you, you. And he is the one who's doing and accomplishing things. So verse 7, you are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Gergesite. And you have kept your promise for you are righteous. So they're remembering their, their, their ancient, in a sense, ancestor Abraham and the promises that God made to him and God kept them. And now they jump a big period of time and they remember when they were in slavery. Verse 9, and you saw the affliction of our fathers and mothers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea. God has done a series of miracles to break them, bring them out of slavery and bring them to the edge of the Red Sea. And you performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land. For you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers and mothers. And you made a name for yourself as it is to this day. And you divided the sea before them so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land. And you cast their pursuers into the depths as a stone into mighty waters.

By a pillar of cloud, you led them in the day and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. So it's describing how they, he, God first does these mighty miracles so that Pharaoh, you know, I've just been reading Exodus in my devotions and, and, and Moses keeps coming to Pharaoh because the Jewish people are enslaved in Egypt. And Moses keeps saying to Pharaoh, God says to you, let my people go. And Pharaoh keeps saying no. And finally, there's so many miracles that Pharaoh let says, get out of here. And then he pursues them. And, but God gets them across the Red Sea as if on dry land. And then on the other side of it, he, he leads the way with a pillar of fire at night and a cloud during the day. And then it jumps ahead to verse 13. You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments. And you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and the law by Moses, your servant. And you gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, that's the manna, and brought water for them out of the rock of their, for their thirst. And you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them. Some of you who know the Bible very well know that Jesus and John's gospel refers to the man is bread from heaven. And that's the Old

[18 : 14] Testament text that he's referring to. Now, what, this is all just about God's great kindness. He's, his kindness in creation, his kindness in calling Abraham to be in a covenant with him, a relationship with him, the, his kindness to the people of Israel when they were in slavery, his kindness in speaking to them. And it all reflects his kindness. And in fact, in many ways, if you think about it, many people, I've met many people over the years who said, if God really wanted me to believe in him, why wouldn't he do something dramatic? And, you know, they might even say, listen, if, if I came to the edge of the Ottawa River and God parted the Ottawa River so I could walk across the Ottawa River on dry land, I would believe in him. In fact, I, I, it would change my life. I would believe in him for the rest of my life. If God could just speak to me in a way that was very obvious that it's just, it's God speaking. If, you know, there was, there was thunder and lightning and clouds in the midst of all that, this huge display of awesomeness at the same time I heard God actually speak. Well, if he did that, I would believe in him and it would change my life. And I, I would live for him forever. Like,

I would understand that. It would completely and utterly convict me. If, if God were to do these miracles, then I, I would believe in him. I would understand him. And that's what many of us say. But look at what happens in verse 16.

Verse 16.

I mean, one of the things I guess we could say to people is if God really wanted me to believe him, why wouldn't he do something like that? And, and we couldn't say, well, actually God did a bit of an experiment for all human beings to let you know that that doesn't work. Like he's done that already.

It doesn't, it doesn't work with people. They can see these remarkable miracles. And then even after they've received the remarkable miracles, they, they still, they turn their back on God. They make their hearts hard to him. They, they want to do their own way. In fact, they actually even want to go back to slavery in Egypt. Like how is that actually sort of, you know, working? It, it, it doesn't work.

[20 : 53] They had what God wanted. Now you might've been able to see that. You can see what happens next. But, you know, the question would be, how does God react to them? He's done all of these things. He's spoken to them. He's done miracles for them. He's delivered them. They've just finished a celebration that the people who are, maybe this is what, one of the things that's led them to actually want to, to have this time of fasting and repentance where, where they've remembered God's deliverance and his provision for them. And then they feel this need to repent.

And, sorry, it's a bit, a bit distracting. I don't know what it is. Anyway. Sorry, lost my place there for a second. How does God react to them? Does he blast them?

Does he say, listen, you guys, like, you know, here it is. I've done all of these things for you. You've completely and utterly turned your back on me now. I'm just going to blast you. I'm just going to send lightning down from heaven to obliterate you. I'm going to have the earth open up. I'm going to have it swallow, I'll swallow you up. But no, that's not how God reacts. He reacts in a very different way. Look how the verse 17 finishes. Actually, I'll begin at verse at the beginning again and then see how it finishes. Verse 17. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, this is your God who brought you up out of Egypt and had committed great blasphemies. You and your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness.

The pillar of God to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way in which they should go. You gave your good spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. So here they do something. They make an idol and they say that this is the this thing, this thing made out of metal, this thing that had performed all the miracles.

And then they want to turn around and they want to go back to Egypt. They want to go back to slavery and how does God respond to it. Well, he doesn't stop giving them manna. He doesn't take away the cloud. He doesn't take away the pillar of fire and he continues to provide for them.

[23 : 41] So here's the thing. You know, if in a sense the the first important thing about the but is that many of us think that if God was just to do a very remarkable miracle in front of us, it would change our lives forever and we would believe in him. But we see that it doesn't actually work.

We also get it wrong when we think of God's judgment. Here's how we get it wrong. You see, what this text is saying is that fundamentally when we do things which are wrong, God is patient with us. He continues to provide for us. He often continues to bless us. And the hope is that if he's patient with us, that we will have, we will come to realize his patience with us and we will follow in a sense our, his goodness back to him. But then if he does that and he does that and does that and then, you know, Christians still say, well, at the end, if you die and you're apart from Christ, you'll be judged by God. You will be cast out of his presence.

And we'll say, well, God, that's not very fair. Like, it's not very fair. If you really wanted me to know you, you should have had consequences for my actions. And if you had consequences for my actions, then I would have known that I need to repent. But if we know our own heart, what happens when there are consequences to our actions, then we think to God, we think of God, well, God, that's not very fair. Why did you give me these bad consequences for my action without giving me more time? If you'd given me more time, then I would have realized that I needed to repent. But you see, we can't have it both ways. The problem is that it's not the problem that there's something wrong with God. God is always God. The problem is within us. If God is patient and kind with us, then we use it as a reason why we can't really believe in him because he doesn't make us very convicted of the wrong things in our lives. And if he convicts us of the wrong things in our lives, then we're upset with him as well because we say you should be more patient with us. Well, you can't, I mean, the problem is you. The problem is that you're confused, not that God's confused, but that you're confused.

And if you go on and you read the rest of the prayer, we're not going to read it now. You're going to read the next six, 17 verses. You'll see that it goes back and forward between God, in fact, actually judging them. And so there's bad consequences and then having mercy on them and delivering them. And it goes back and forward all the way through the rest of the text. I'm not going to bother reading. You can look at it yourself. But, and this is all leading up to why it's an insight about us changing. If you could put up the first point, that would be very helpful.

One of the things which is very clear throughout the rest of the text is that the triune God punishes you by giving you what you want. The triune God punishes you by giving you what you want.

[26 : 56] In fact, it's very interesting. It actually goes back and forward. I could have written this point in a separate way. The triune God punishes you not by giving you what you want, but by letting you get what you want. And that's how he punishes us.

And that's sort of counterintuitive on one hand, but if you think about it for a second, it's, remember I began, why is it, why is it, like for those struggling with porn, why is it that you know that it's wrong, you know that it hurts your relationships, you know that, you know that it demeans you, you know that it, you just know all these different reasons why, you know, it takes up all sorts of your time, and then you go back to it. Or, or you, you know that you need to have some more control of your money, and because your, your, your debt, indebtedness is just causing you problems, and you get some type of control over it, then the next thing you know you've gone and you bought some shoes, and you bought a purse, and, and you bought a bike, and, and your credit card debt is just way up to the, the, the yahoo. Or, or why, how, how is it that you realize that you have to put a, a break on your ambition, and a break on your, your, your over concern with money, because it's, it's ruining your time with your family, and it's ruining your marriage, and it's ruining your friendships, because you're just so driven to, it doesn't even matter if you lose all your friends, because you're driven to have a, to have promotions in a career, and then you come to your senses, and you realize that it's, that it, it's, it's, it's a wrong thing, but then you go back to it. Well, this text here, in a sense, is saying that, in a sense, there's a, comes a point in time when, whether it's God actually giving you what you want, or he lets you just pursue what you want, that his common grace that brings you back and stops you from complete ruination, he just removes that, and when he removes that, you, you, you spend more and more time with the porn, you, you, you spend more and more time with your idols about your, your importance, or, or your need for money, or your need to spend, or your need for alcohol, or your need for drugs, or your need for affirmation, or your need for praise, or, or whatever it is, and, and you go more and more whole hog into it, and all it does is enslaves you and ruins you, and all the way through the rest of the prayer, when God says he's giving you to your enemies, he's not giving you to people who don't, he, he's giving you to the things that you want, without you realizing that the things that you want in such a fashion are your enemies that ruin you.

You, you, you come to that point in time when you, you've got the cars, you've got the houses, you've got, you, you've, you've got piles of money in the bank, and you, you sit in your, in your fancy house all by yourself, because you've burned every relationship in your entire life, and now you've had the thing that you've given your life to that you think will give you meaning, and all it's done is make you less of a person all alone. And the reason all of this is happening, is if you could put up the next point, that would be very helpful, and I've sort of adapted a words from a Bob Dylan song, is that human beings are made so that we've got to serve somebody.

That, that's our problem. It's not our problem, it's, it's not a bug, it's, it's a feature. I was made to know the triune God, and I was made to love him, and I was made to serve him, and I was made to find my rest in him, and my identity in him, and my meaning in him, and my hope in him, and my peace in him, and when I cast him away, and want to go my own way and be like a god, that desire to still serve and be connected and find meaning, it doesn't go away, it just goes and attaches itself to other things, it attaches itself to money, or ideologies, or, or houses, or, or things, or, or sex, or reputation, or power, or, or the nation, or, or, or, or the, the corporation, it just attaches to other type of things, and you've got to serve somebody, or something, or somewhat, and the fact of the matter is, is that that somebody, something, or somewhat will end up just ruining you, it will consume you, they have no breaks, the only apparent breaks that are there are the breaks that come from God's common grace, his patience to you, that you will realize that there's these things that will end up consuming you, and ruining you, in a sense what the Bible text is wanting us to do is, is, is making us realize time, and time, and time again, that as we serve these things that are ultimately our enemies, that aren't the true and living God, we will come to a point where we realize that we need God to deliver us, and we need his mercy, because I don't have the strength in myself to save myself, I, I do for a short period of time, and then I go back to these things, and these things just ruin me, and it's, in a sense, God leaves that in us, so that we will call out to him for deliverance, and for mercy, now here, just in closing, this goes back to our, well, actually, just, just listen, the texts aren't up there, this is where it's better if you have your own Bibles, listen to

Romans 8, where it describes what it is that Christ does for us, and we pour out our heart to him, that when, that, that Jesus sees that I'm serving things that ruin me, and he sees that that's where I want to go, that I want to find my meaning in these things, I want to find my hope in these things, I think that if I can just have these things that'll satisfy my desires, and I'll be a better person, and he sees how these things ruin me, and he sees all of these things, and still he loves me and dies on the cross for me, he loves me and dies on the cross for me, and when Christ dies on the cross for me, that the punishment that I deserve is, is, is, is dealt with, the, he pardons my sin, he gives me new life, he gives me new hope, and a new final word, and he gives me his presence, and he provides within himself a safe place, and a sanctuary, and a hope, listen how it's described in Romans chapter 8, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death, for God has done what the law, in other words, by moral effort, weakened by our flesh, our sinful human nature, could not do, he does something for us that we couldn't do, by sending his own son in the likeness of our flesh, flesh, and he takes our place so that sin is condemned, and he does this so that God's righteousness might be fulfilled, and, and that his Holy Spirit, his Holy Spirit will come and dwell within us, and by the end of the text, he's saying this, what then shall we say to these things, if God is for us, who can be against us, he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things, who shall bring any charge against God's chosen ones, it is God who justifies, who is to condemn,

[35 : 17] Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us, who shall separate us from the love of Christ, shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword, as it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered, no, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, for I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, because you see, when we understand that we got to serve somebody, and that our loves are disordered, and we can't save ourselves, and we call out to God for mercy, and he says, I am a God of mercy, I have provided for your need, I have paid for your transgressions, I have given you new life,

I have given you the presence of your Holy Spirit, of my Holy Spirit, I have pledged myself to you that when you put your hands in mine, and I take your hand, my hand will never let you go, it will never let you go, and the final word about you will be, come into my kingdom, my son or my daughter, and that is your final, the God's final word about you in Christ.

And what that does is creates a sanctuary. You see, as the gospel becomes more real to our hearts, it becomes a sanctuary.

And I can say, Lord, I fell back into the porn, I fell back into the debt, I fell back into the workaholicism, I fell back into unforgiveness, I fell back into jealousy, I fell back into envy, I fell back into pride, I fell back into arrogance, I fell back into despair.

I fell back into hatred. Thank you so much that you never let me go. Thank you for Jesus. And then we can pray the prayer of saying, Lord, please, please, you've been my savior, and you're never going to let me go, please be my Lord.

[37 : 52] Help me to put these things in their proper place, help me to put these things away that need to go away, and order my steps, govern me.

Turn my greed into generosity, turn my anger into compassion, turn my hatred into love, turn my obsession into peace and freedom, turn my despair into hope.

I come to you today, I come to your table, I come to your church, I hear your word, I'm reminded of your great love for me, and once again, I commit myself to you, and I know you haven't weighed my merits, you've pardoned my offenses, and I'm just so glad, Father, that I can come and be with other sinners, to remember the great, your great mercy to us, and your son's death upon the cross, and I commit myself to you again.

And I know this week I will maybe stumble and fall, but I ask, Lord, that you help me not. And if you could put the final point, Jesus saves you and leads you into the freedom of true and ordered love.

That's the thing I want to close with. It isn't that when Jesus becomes the Lord of your life, that he becomes so completely and utterly all-consuming, that there is no marriage, there is no money, there are no houses, there are no jobs, there are no promotions.

[39 : 20] But he takes your disordered love for promotions, and orders it. He takes your disordered love for affection, and he orders it. He takes your disordered love for friendship, and he orders it.

He takes your disordered love for affirmation, and he orders it. He puts it in a hierarchy, where you learn to have him be your chief end in love.

And as that begins to become more real to your heart, these other things don't vanish, but they have their proper end and their proper power.

And that's the promise of the gospel. I invite you to stand. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Father, I confess, we confess, that we rarely ask ourselves, what idol are we wanting to serve?

[40 : 20] What idol do we think will give us meaning in our life? What idol do we think will give us hope? What idol do we think is going to give us comfort?

Father, we rarely ask that. And we ask, Lord, that you help to make the gospel so real to our heart, that we desire Jesus to truly be the Lord of our lives. And Father, as we deal with discontent, and as we deal with sin, we ask that you would reveal to us those idols that we want to serve and run after and worship.

And as you make them clearer to us, Father, we ask that you put them in their proper place, that we would seek our meaning and hope and comfort in the person of your Son and of your kindly and gracious rule over us.

And we give you thanks and praise that you do not want to obliterate our loves, but you want to purify and cleanse and order our loves so that we might be free.

So, Father, we ask that you would help us to trust your great goodness as we think about your Son and all he has done for us, to not fear you in a way as if you would hurt us, but to know how good you are and how true you are and how your word is always trustworthy.

[41 : 41] And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.