

Acts 17:16-34 "Need Love or Gift Love?"

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's bow our heads in prayer for a moment. Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would continue to fall upon us with gentle but very deep power. Father, we don't really know ourselves.

And so we ask, Father, that the gentle work of your Holy Spirit deep within us, that in light of the gospel and knowing about Jesus and what He did for us on the cross and your great love for us in Him, your adoption of us by grace and knowing these things. Father, help us to so read the Bible that we know ourselves better and that you, Father, would help us to grow in freedom, in generosity, in love, in courage, in steadfastness. Father, for all of these great virtues, that you would grow these in us as we know ourselves better in the face of Christ and in the face of your Word.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So I have really good news for all of you folks here this morning. Sort of one of the several ways to summarize the whole sermon, the Bible text, and this really great news is that God has absolutely no need for you. He has zero need for any single one of you, and I, by the way, include myself in this, he has no need for me whatsoever. In the name of the Father, the Son, no, we won't do that. I mean, as we all know, that's one of the great things that we fear is that moment where people don't need us.

[2 : 4 8] And in the context of most of human life, it is, in fact, a worrisome thing. It would be the type of thing that you maybe talk about when the women gather together. For the women's group, the men gather together. For the men's group, or your small group, or talk to me about is this deep thing, is you used to be needed by your family, or your friends, or your work, and now nobody needs you, and it's just, there's like a chasm, a pit in your life. But one of the messages of the Bible today, in a very, very different context, in fact, in a very hopeful context, is the message, God does not need you, period. Well, let's look. So if you take out your Bibles, and I'm using here the little, we still have a couple of them left, the free Bibles, if you'd like them, the journaling Bibles for the book of Acts. Acts chapter 17, beginning at verse 16, we're preaching through the book of Acts, and that's where we are, and I didn't turn on my timer, which is not necessarily good news for you folks. I have a lot to say, no. Now I have the timer on. And so, yeah, so let's go to that, and here's sort of the bigger story. Paul is on what we now call his second missionary journey.

In these chapters, the chapter we looked at last two weeks, the gospel has leapfrogged into Europe for the very first time, and now Paul is in Europe, which at that time was deeply pagan.

And once again, he's had to flee, and one of the things which isn't very obvious in the text is there's been, in a sense, a weakening of Paul over the last few stories. Paul goes into Philippi with three buddies, three co-workers, Luke, Timothy, and Silas, and then after they have to leave Philippi, Luke stays behind, and so they go to Thessalonica and Berea, which we looked at last week. Paul goes now with Pilate, Pilate, Pilate, Timothy and Silas. But after this last event of the crowds wanting to get at Paul, Silas and Timothy stay behind, and now the story continues with Paul all by himself, going into the city, which is the intellectual center of the Roman Empire, and he's

eventually going to go into the very heart of the heart of the intellectual center of the Roman Empire. So let's see what happens. Verse 16, now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was full of idols. And just sort of pause here for a second.

You know, one of the things I try to do is to help us to see that this is a very human story. These aren't superstars. These aren't superheroes doing this. They're ordinary people. And you know, generally speaking, you know, if I get provoked, a lot of times that's not necessarily a good thing when I get provoked. And you know, sometimes I confess, I can be hangry. I don't know if anybody else can be like that. Like I'm hungry, and I get angry because I'm hungry. And you know, I should probably just go and have a bite to eat. So it's not the case that somebody could come up to Paul and say, hey, listen, don't be hangry. Go have, you know, we're in Greece. Gosh, they have spectacular salads, spectacular kebabs, and really good wine. Have a nice meal. You'll have like having a chill pill, you'll be a lot better. But the word for provoked here is the same word, the what we now call the Old Testament and our Jewish friends call the Tanakh or the Torah. That was translated into Greek about a hundred years before this. And in that version of the Old Testament, the word provoked comes up all the time. And it's always used of God being provoked at the idolatry of his people. He sees the idolatry, and it just wounds him and crushes God that people are doing something that's so vain and so futile and so wrongheaded because he loves them. And that's the same word which is being used here. The other thing which is really interesting, the word full of idols, the end of it, full of idols, that also could be translated as submerged in idols. Ancient writers who talked about Athens at around this time said that Athens, which was maybe a city of about 25 to 30,000 people, there were north of 73,000 idols in Athens. In fact, some Greek writers at that time who were humorous would joke that when you went to

Athens, it was easier to find and meet an idol than it was a human being because there were so many idols. So the whole city is submerged in idols. And so what happens? So Paul gets provoked, and we all know, at least a lot of people in Canada would maybe say, oh, a woman Christians get provoked, they throw a temper tantrum, they get very self-righteous, they get holier than thou, you know, they go on rants, they throw fits. Well, what does Paul do after he's provoked? Well, let's look, verse 17. And what does it say? So Paul reasoned. He reasoned. He had a conversation.

[8 : 05] Had a conversation looking at reasons. He reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons. Devout persons here means people who were pagans, who were beginning to be interested in the god of the Tanakh, but had not become Jews. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and these devout persons.

And he also reasoned in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. So here you now have my biblical warrant to work in coffee shops, because that's what Paul does.

He goes where people gather to just chat and relax, and he has conversations with them. So there you go. That's my biblical basis for going to coffee shops, or you guys can go to McDonald's or whatever it is.

But he just goes, he strikes up conversations with people. Obviously, in a sense, he gossips the gospel. Verse 18, it continues. But some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with Paul.

And some said, what does this babbler wish to say? And others said, he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities, because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And the word for resurrection in this original language is anastasis. And Jesus is masculine, anastasis is feminine.

[9 : 27] And he was making such a big deal of the resurrection, the resurrection, they thought he was talking about a male and female God, like a husband and wife God and goddess. And the other thing about this, which is very important, is that, well, it would be like, and he did it like as a joke.

There used to be a guy who came to the church a long, long time ago. And he was a Cambridge PhD, had that very, very upper crust British accent. And occasionally he would, I'd say something about Oxford. He said, oh, you mean people still go to that other university? I didn't know people did that. So you need to hear that tone, foreign divinities, like with that sort of a superior type of tone.

Verse 19, and they took him, not, they didn't take him like grabbing him. This is just, they said, let's, and I said, let's go. We're going to go to the intellectual center of the intellectual center of the Roman Empire. Verse 19, and they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, may we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? And so maybe some of them were hoping that he'd fall on his face and they could make fun at him and snicker. Maybe some of them were

worried that he was doing something illegal. Maybe some of them were just genuinely curious, different motives. But they bring them right to the very center. And in verse 20, they say, for you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean. Now this next text is very important, verse 21, because it says, now all the Athenians and foreigners who lived there would spend all of their time on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Oh wait, no, it doesn't say that, does it? It's just like, Canadians don't spend all their time on what's new, by the way, right? So this is completely foreign world. Actually, really, like, the Canadians just showed up. Modern Canadians who spend all their time trying to hear what, that's something new. So here's just a very simple, not a throwaway point, it's a very important point. If you could put up the first point, Claire, that would be very helpful. When people put you down or are hostile to you because you are a Christian, bear witness to Jesus anyway. When people put you down or are hostile to you because you are a Christian, bear witness to Jesus anyway. That's what Paul does. They're making fun of him, they'd like to see him fall on his face, and he bears witness to Jesus anyway.

Anyway, that's often what it's like in large parts of Canada nowadays. Bear witness to Jesus anyway. You're in a, just don't wait for it to get that they're really open. Bear witness to Jesus anyway.

[12:07] Anyway, what does Paul say? Okay, he has this opportunity. What does he say? Now, what we're going to see here is I think like 10 verses or something, and he probably spoke for somewhere between an hour to two. And so what you're seeing here is in a sense Paul's outline. That he would say, okay, I talked about this and I gave these arguments, I talked about this, gave these arguments.

You get the flow of the argument, the substance of how he went about it. And so it's very, very interesting. This is the second and longest time in the book of Acts where you get an outline of how Paul talked to people who knew nothing whatsoever about the Bible. Zilch. And so it's very interesting.

How did he go about doing it? How do you talk to people who have no idea whatsoever about anything to do with the Bible? Even if they've heard bits and pieces of the Bible, they might not know that it came from the Bible, you know. And so how does he do it? Well, this is what we see as a bit of an outline. It begins with verse 22. Now, sorry. So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said, men of Athens, only men there at that, mainly men. There would have been bystanders listening, but he's addressing the officials who in that day would have all been men. Men of Athens, I perceived that in every way you were very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, to the unknown God. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. Now, just sort of pause here. He's done something which is very clever, which you can't get in English. In the original language, when he says, men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious, that's a phrase in the original language which has a double meaning. And it can either mean what it's translated to in English, a compliment, you're very religious, way to go. Or it could mean, it could be a put down. So I'm sure it really got everybody's attention because now everybody's looking and thinking, okay, one moment, is this guy just dissing us? Or is he actually trying to compliment us? So it's actually sort of a very clever beginning, but it also is going to get at some very profound and important truths. And the other thing about it is that in fact, Greek writers, pagan writers, Greek writers, bear witness to the fact that out of those 73,000, north of 73,000 idols, that there were in fact idols to the unknown God. We have independent evidence that that's actually something that existed in Athens. Now, what does he mean by all of this?

And why does he begin with this? So here's how we have to try to understand it. It's going to be a little bit shocking to us. But here's the first thing, if you could put up the first point.

[15:16] You were designed to worship the living God. You were designed to worship the living God. It's something which has been hardwired into us by God. And in a moment, we'll see, because Paul's going to talk about the doctrine of creation in the next little bit. But that's just the way God designed us. He designed us to long for him, to desire to be with him, to honor him, to respect him, to put our trust and hope in him, to find our meaning in him, to find our joy in him, to understand that being with him is how we have success and how we flourish. And God hardwired that in to human beings. You will never meet a human being that that's not been hardwired into them. Now, obviously, that is something which people aren't aware of, but that's in fact behind what Paul is

saying here.

And the second thing that goes with that, if you could put up the next point, is this. After the fall, every human being worships idols. So, you know, one of the things we can say about Church of the Messiah, come here because I flatter you all the time. So I've already told you that God doesn't need you. Now I flatter you again. Every single one of you are idol worshipers.

There you go. I've just flattered you a second. I'm just joking. This is what we need to hear, by the way. It doesn't matter. Dawkins, Hitchens, leading atheists, idol worshipers.

The Pope, George, you, we all worship idols. You see, what happened is that when human beings fell, when they rejected God and desired to be God themselves, God didn't erase the hard wiring within us to be worshipers. He didn't erase that. It's still there ticking along. But now, because we won't worship the living God, we still worship. And so we end up worshipping other things.

And these other things, because they're not God, are idols. And if you could put up the last question for this bit, number four, that would be great. So the question for every human being, every single human being that you will meet today, and every single human being you will ever meet, and every single one of us, the question is never, will I worship? The question is, who or what are you already worshipping? Who or what are you already worshipping? That's the fundamental human question.

Now, I am a sinner redeemed by grace. I am both justified and a sinner at the same time. I'm clothed with Christ's righteousness. I have been adopted as his child when I put my faith and trust in Jesus as my Savior and my Lord. And nothing can take me out of Christ's hands when I put my hands in him. And these are all very true. But God has chosen in wisdom that while that's true of us, we still have to become more Christ-like in our daily life. And in that sense, we need to, we struggle with the common human sins and all. So in a sense, what it's saying is this, is that if you think of a person as being like a, as being like in a car driving, as a Christian, my desire is not that I'm in the driver's seat, but that Jesus is in the driver's seat. That, that in a sense, should be what I would, I desire.

[18 : 41] That as I go through my day, as I go through my life, as I make my plans, as I relate to my wife, as I relate to my kids, as I relate to the staff, to relate to people in coffee shops, that Jesus is the driver. But what happens is, if I, and I don't recognize this, but my car doesn't just have Jesus, it also has idols in it. And, and often what ends up happening is that the idols put Jesus out of the driver's seat, and it's the idol in the driver's seat. And idols only ruin lives. An idol will ruin you.

It gives you false hopes, vain hopes, vain promises that depress you, that make you unhappy, that make you more anxious. The more you worship idols, the more anxious you will be. And it's a complete, and one of the things I've really been thinking about a lot this week, but I, you know, you asked me about it later. I drove almost 1,200 kilometers this week because of the two things I did outside of, outside of the city. And I, you know, I realized I could probably think of a couple of idols that you have problems with, but I can't see them in my own life. It's hard to see them in my own life.

That's part of the nature of idolatry. In some ways it was way easier in Athens. Oh yeah, that's my idol. That's my idol. No, not that one, not that one. Oh yeah, that one over there, that's my idol. But in some ways it's harder in a place like Ottawa because idols are often invisible to us. And so there are things in my life that I think I need to have that. I need to serve that. That will give me meaning. That will give me peace. That will give me direction. That will make me whole. That will make me flourish.

That will make me be a success. And what are those things other than the true and living God? And whatever those things other than the true and living God, those are the idols in my life, in your life. So a lot of times, one of the things which is missing in a lot of counseling, and by the way, I know mental illness exists and addictions exist and alcoholism exists and there's things that go on.

[20 : 42] But one of the missing thing a lot of times in our conversations is a discernment about what the idols are in our lives. So the question is never what Paul is saying here when he says, I'm going to proclaim to you, you have this hard wire to worship, and I'm not going to take away that hard wire to worship. I'm going to reveal to you how it's gone wrong and what the solution, what the hope is.

So how does he begin to do that? Well, And why should we think that it's even true? Well, one of the things about Christianity is it's actually very, very deep and extensive and high and coherent and comprehensive. And we often don't appreciate just how glorious the big story of the Bible really is. And so Paul will now start to, you know, unearth some of this to us. Look at verse 24. The God

who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, made by human beings. In fact, actually, literally, it says, does not live in temples made by human hands. You just think about it for a how could any human being make something that God could live in. Like the idea is actually absurd.

But he continues, nor is God served by human hands as though he needed anything. That's where I got the idea. Since he himself gives to all humankind life and breath and everything. God gives us absolutely everything, even our breath, even our existence. So if that is the case, how on earth could I possibly ever give anything to God that he needs? Verse 26, And God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all of the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. In other words, it's trying to communicate that the one God created the entire universe, everything that exists. And he also is Lord. He's not like a deist that created God, created the world, and then he's off on a holiday while it just works by itself. He continues to be, in a sense, active and present in his created order as Lord. And then it continues, verse 27, that they should seek God. So he's made one man, I'll read verse 26 again. God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. That's where we get this idea of human beings having these design features hardwired within them. And then part of that hard wiring is verse 27, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. For, now he quotes a Greek poet, in him we live and move and have our being. And as even some of your own poets have said, and he does quotes another one, for we are indeed your offspring. Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of human beings. Now just sort of pause here for a second. You know, there's so many things, you know, I have to confess, one of the things I had to pray against in this, some of you know, I have a great, great, great love for Christian apologetics.

And in some ways, I had to keep reigning in how I'd like to go off on apologetics elements. And obviously, a lot of this is against the idolatry as practiced back then, but I have to stop that. But here's the things that we get from this. If you could put up the fifth point, that would be very helpful. What Paul is saying here is that the one God created one universe and one man, and from that one man, one humanity. The one God created one universe and one man, and from that one man, one humanity. Also, it's not relevant to his argument here, but he also created whatever that spiritual realm is of angels and demons who are fallen angels. So here's the thing.

[25 : 21] You should not believe anything because you wish it was true. But you sometimes need to ask yourself, why do I wish for certain things to be true? Like, why do those wishes and longings exist? So here's the thing. If you're opposed to racism, if you're opposed to sexism, if you're opposed to slavery, you should wish that Christianity is true.

Because there is no, literally no system of thought, not in Hinduism, not in Buddhism, not in rationalism, the secular thought of Canadian society, not in Islam. There is no system of thought that so deeply and thoroughly rejects all racism and sexism, ageism. This is a profound statement of the unity of human beings as all being equally human. Everything, I know this is controversial, everything from the fetus within the womb to the moment of our death, all human beings have this profound dignity. There's only one humanity. And it's actually, even if you go back and you look at the other things in there, it's even saying that it was part of God's design that there would be different people groups all over the planet. In a sense, what you could say is that, you know, the fact that we are all of different colors isn't a problem. It's actually a design feature.

That's God's intention. And who knows, maybe because of the fall, God curtailed our difference. So one of the things I'm going to probably tell to my granddaughters is that in our church, we have reindeers on the stage of the church with twinkly lights. So you should come and visit our church. And, you know, the, probably if they were here, if this was actually our church, they'd say, Papa, could we put sparkles on the reindeers? Because little girls like sparkles. Probably some little boys do too. And who knows, maybe if we hadn't fallen, there'd be sparkly human beings.

Like, who knows how many colors there'd be. But it's actually a design feature. And so this is actually a very, very, very, very deep refutation of all prejudice, all racism. And it's only Christianity provides such a deep basis for the dignity of human beings and such a deep rejection of things like slavery and racism. And so even if you're outside the faith, you should wish that it's true. And as we can see in the world, as the world loses its Christian memory, racism becomes more rampant. There's more race, a whole other topic, call me for coffee. There's way more racism in Canada now

than there was 50 years ago. Way more racism today than before.

And another thing which comes out of this very, very brief section, which is really important, and it has to do with tragedy. So one of the things I try to do, and you could pray for me in this, probably like once a month, maybe every three weeks, somebody in one of my coffee shops on a Friday or a Saturday or a Sunday or a Monday will say, on Friday or Saturday, they'll say, George, what are you talking about on Sunday? This person who's outside the Christian faith. Maybe sometimes when I'm on my way home, I stop at a particular coffee shop where they know me and sometimes say, what are you talking about today? Or they'll ask me on Monday. So one of the things I try to do with all the talks is, what would I say to them? You know, I don't want to tell them that I'm discussing some obtuse, really, you know, exotic theological, biblical distinction, even if I do that. I'm not smart enough to do that. But so one of the things, actually, so just yesterday, a businessman that I knew, as he got his coffee was going out, and he said, hey, George, what are you talking about on Sunday? And I said, oh, I'm talking about how life is a tragedy, but we wish it was a comedy and the difference Christianity makes. He said, oh, he's a well enough off business person, just retired. He said, yeah, you know, I guess for some people life is a tragedy. I said, no, no, no, no, I think what the Bible, what we're going to look at is that all human life is a tragedy, because all human life ends in death. We want a comedy where it doesn't end in tragedy, but I think that's what I'm going to talk about, how the Bible actually points the way to have your life turned from tragedy to comedy. He went, oh, I never really thought about the fact he was going to lose everything the moment he dies, you know, and he went off, went off for his walk. Well, that's the next thing. If you could put up the point, that would be good.

[30 : 24] This is the beginning. There's going to be several ways that we talk about tragedy, but here's the first aspect of tragedy. Tragically, God, sorry, tragically, I gave the wrong analogy for that point. I just realized that. That's what happens when I talk and I don't read from a text. Anyway, we'll get back to it. Number six, tragically, God is very, very, very close to you, yet too far away for you to reach him. Tragically, God is very, very close to you, yet too far away for you to reach him. This is the first aspect of the tragedy which is talked about in the text. So where does that, that comes from that part of the text where Paul says that God is very, very close to us, that we might seek after him and potentially find him. But what's missing in that English translation is this sense of tragedy that we can't reach him. And so the image which is given is that in some ways it can be theologically true, biblically true, to say that God is closer to you than you are to yourself. God is closer to you than your breath is close to you. That's how close God is to you. Yet in the other hand, you can't cross that distance to God to reach him. And that's the, that's the human tragedy. And that's, that's what drives, you know, about two months ago I was listening to the testimony of a person who'd grown up in a Muslim household and become a Christian. And he, he said that when he was a 15 year old boy, he wanted to go on jihad. He was afraid of death.

And he wanted to go on jihad because he knew from, from Muhammad that if he went on jihad and died, he would go right to heaven. And he was afraid of God's judgment and he was afraid of death. And so he thought the solution is to die nobly in jihad and go right to heaven. Human beings have this sense of this tragedy of distance and how they can somehow close, close that distance between God and human beings. And in a sense, you know, if you watch certain types of movies, you'll, you'll see some types of movies like mountain movies or adventure movies. You know, you see, you find out something tragic happens very early on and that's why they're now sort of retired and they get drawn back into this great thing that only they can solve. But, you know, it might be something like they're fighting and all of that and, and their, their best friend or their dad or their son or their daughter or their husband or their wife, depending on their, their sex. You know, maybe they're, they're about to fall to their death and you reach out to try to grab them and, and their fingers, you know, just come this, this close to each other that just can't reach them. They're really close. You just can't reach them.

And then the person plunges to their death and throws the person into a tailspin. That sense of closeness, but unbridgeable distance is what's trying to be communicated in the text. That, tragically, God is very, very, very close to you, yet too far away for you to reach him.

Now, Paul doesn't just sort of leave it that like that to depress us, uh, but how he moves to the hope is by talking about something that we're not allowed to talk about in Canada in polite conversation. He goes to the hope of this tragic depiction by talking about death and God's judgment. Two topics we're not allowed to talk to about in Canada. Look what he does.

Verse 30. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from death. Now, a couple of things here about this. If you could put up the, um, the, the seventh point, that would be very helpful.

[34 : 26] Okay. So give me some mercy here, because I'm not going to express it very well. I don't want to say, like the way I was going to express it makes it think that if you don't think and feel this, you're not very thoughtful. And that's, I don't want to, I'm not, I'm not trying to say, I don't want to say that. I'm just, I have a problem struggling with the words.

Uh, but in our heart of hearts, if we press in and really think about it, um, in your heart of hearts, you know that death is not natural, that death feels like the judgment of God. This is true. In your heart of hearts, you know that death is not natural. Death feels like the judgment of God. You know, it's really actually a, like an astounding piece of human psychology.

There's nothing more natural than death on one level. But why is it that we don't think it's natural? We think life is natural. Death isn't natural. I mean, the scientists tell us, because of the second law of thermodynamics and because of the big bang, that in fact, the whole universe is doomed. The whole universe is winding down. And yet, why is it that nobody feels like death is really natural? No matter how much they talk, no matter how much they, um, they talk about made. By the way, I, I've come up with a new acronym. You know, like one of the, the, the big problems in our culture is that like, who wouldn't want a maid? Who wouldn't want government to give you a maid? Like, why wouldn't you want maid? It even sounds very helpful. That's medical. Like, there's doctors. So here's what the new, here's what the new word, we should start using a new word, scalp. Who wants to be scalped by the government? Nobody. Why? It's because what, what, what, uh, what they're doing is it's socially condoned, socially condoned administration of lethal poison. That doesn't sound nearly as attractive.

Go to the government to be scalped. No, no, that doesn't sound very good. Anyway, uh, what's going on? But you see, we, we know that death isn't natural and, and some, in our heart of hearts and that it feels somehow just wrong, almost like a judgment upon us and we don't know where to go with it.

And, and so here's the, if you could put up the next point, that would be very helpful. The, the human story is a tragedy, but Jesus came to change the story of your life from tragedy to comedy.

[36 : 49] The story, the human story is a tragedy. All human beings die. The universe will die. But change, Jesus came to change the story of your life from a tragedy to a comedy. You see, in a tragedy, even the word tragedy, it reflects a Christian understanding. Tragedies are about somebody who's, who's great and noble and excellent and yet comes undone and comes to a terrible end.

And comedy also talks about people who, well, sometimes it talks about people who are overlooked because they don't seem to be important and they end up triumphing. But even if there is some type of greatness in human beings and it looks like it's all going to go wrong, it ends up in life. It ends up in, in, in, in laughter and in joy and in applause and in, and in marriage and in hugs and kisses and, and, and, and happiness. And, and, and the human story is a tragedy. But Jesus came to change the story of your life from tragedy to a comedy. See, this is what I was trying to get at with this business guy that I was trying to hint at. And the resurrection changes everything. Like, listen to it again when he says here, um, at the end of verse 31, uh, he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given assurance to all by raising Jesus from the dead. And this word assurance here has a double type of meaning. On one hand, it means that the resurrection of Jesus vindicates him. You know that you can trust him, that when he tells you that you're hardwired for idolatry, you are. When he tells you that the triune God is God, he is. It vindicates him in his message. When he says, if you put your faith and trust in me, you will become my child forever and I will never let you go. You can trust him. You can have assurance about that.

And at the same time as well, assurance is that if Jesus is risen from the dead, if one man, just as all life, all humanity came from one man, if one man rises from the dead, there's hope for human beings.

That the judgment that seems to be in death, the doom that is connected to death, and death itself in the person of Jesus and in his work has been defeated. It has been dealt with. We have

assurance about that when we put our faith and trust and hope in him. If you put your faith and trust in Jesus, your life goes from tragedy to comedy. And who wouldn't want that to be true?

True. But there's evidence that it is true, that it really happened. And the final point, you know, when I said that God doesn't need you, I have to end with that.

[39 : 32] You see, well, here, if you could put up the final point, that would be very, very helpful. God's pure, unfailing love for you is all a gift. It is never needy. God's pure, unfailing love for you is all gift. It is never, ever, ever needy. See, only Christianity is truly a religion of love.

Hinduism and Buddhism has a fundamental problem at a very, very deep level because of, in a sense, of all is one or the one is in all things. It's in good and it's evil. It's in hatred. It's in love. It's in all of these things. And even though, obviously, Hinduism doesn't teach that type of indifference, it will encourage love and has love songs and all of those types of things at a very deep level. It has longings within it that are better than its overall way of thinking. And Islam is the same type of thing that, you know, Allah doesn't even want to talk to human beings directly. So he talks to an angel who talks to Muhammad. And at the end of the day, it's all about just becoming a slave to Allah.

But, and how can everything be love if there needs to be another, something different than yourself to love? And that can't happen in Hinduism or Buddhism. And it can't happen in Islam. And it can't happen in atheism or secularism. But only Christianity says is that from all eternity, the Father has loved the Son, and the Son has loved the Father, and the Son has loved the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has loved the Son, and the Holy Spirit and the Father. And so they, they, they, they, they, there's this, there's this unending exchange and interchange of love.

And there is no need within God. And so God, when he creates, he does not come out of any type of need. He creates out of the gift of love. It's out of his love that he decides as a gift to give existence to creatures that he has created. And he gives for us absolutely everything. There's nothing I can add to him, that, or give him that he doesn't, he can't make for himself. And so his love for me never comes out of need.

[41 : 43] That's, in, in light of the gospel and Jesus dying for me, that means that God not needing me ever, rather than being something depressing, is actually something that, as we reflect upon it, gives us greater confidence and rest in Jesus. Your love for me, Father, is always gift. There won't come a point in time you look at George and say, oh, well, he's not going to be a pastor anymore. I don't need him.

Off with he goes. You know, his kids have all moved out. Don't need him anymore. Off he goes. You know, he's getting a bit really, really, really old and shuffling. Don't need him anymore. Off he goes.

You know, he can't think as well. Off he goes. That's the deep fear. But when you understand the gospel and you understand what the Bible is saying here, that God relates to every human being purely as gift love, never as need love, you don't have to worry about no longer being needed by other people.

And you don't have to worry about not being needed by God, because his love for you, as seen in Jesus, is pure, unfailing, unstoppable, unending gift.

I invite you to stand. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, you know that every single one of us struggles with not wanting to love other people because we don't need them anymore.

[43 : 21] And you know how we struggle with friendships ending or relationships ending because they don't need us anymore. And their love was just a type of need love. And Father, you know how we struggle with that?

You know the wounds and the scars we have from that? You know the wounds and scars we've inflicted on other people that sometimes bothers our conscience? You know all those things about us. We give you thanks and praise that, Father, in the person of your Son, when we put our faith and trust in him, that your love for us is just gift, never need.

Father, we ask that you would tune our hearts and tune our minds to receive this profound truth and to rest in it. And Father, as we rest in your love for us, we return, Father, to that earlier part of the sermon.

And Father, it's hard for us to see the idols in our lives that are bending us out of shape and breaking us. And so, Father, we ask that your word would so become real to us and form us. And your Holy Spirit would so be powerful and work within us that you might help us not only to dwell in your gift love, but to recognize the idols in our lives and to kick them out of our lives.

[44 : 28] And when they climb back into our lives, Father, help us to kick them out again and kick them out again and again and again, knowing, Father, that we should worship and trust you and you only desire our freedom and fullness.

You only desire our flourishing. And so, Father, we ask that you would do these wonderful works of grace in each of our lives. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus and all God's people said, Amen.

Amen.