

Saved to Love

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today in the morning, and now we've heard in the evening, there's been a focus on mission, particularly local mission. We learned this morning about the kind of beginnings of a new church to be started, to be planted, as the language is used, in the Beres-Dan-Mulgai area of Glasgow.

And just now, we've heard from Craig and Jillian about the work of SU and other efforts here in the city to bring the gospel to this city.

Well, front and center, I think in both of those enterprises, if you listened to Nate this morning and just now as we heard our presentation, front and center in those enterprises is the gospel.

Because the gospel is the unique thing that we in the church have to offer the world. All that we do wants to either explicitly refer or point to the gospel or are the natural fruits outgrowing from the gospel.

Now, some of those fruits might very well look like what other people do, such as feeding or clothing or supporting, tutoring. And they only look like others, however, because the others learn to do those things from Christians.

[1 : 1 8] It is the followers of Jesus who taught the world to value human beings, to deplore injustice, and to work for the flourishing of societies. So such good endeavors are the product of gospel, biblically-minded Christians acting upon the implications of the gospel.

So the gospel, as Nate reminded us this morning, is essential to the mission of the church. It is in the gospel that we offer salvation.

As the Apostle Paul writes, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for in it the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

And so the gospel, proclaiming the gospel, mediating the gospel, living out the gospel, is a noble and necessary task. Because as Paul goes on to say, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

So the belief or faith, belief or faith in what God has done to save people on the day when indeed his wrath against this unrighteousness shall have its full devastating expression, what God has done supplies a reason to hope that a human being will be able to stand on that day rather than cower in fear.

[2 : 5 0] Confidence. Confidence. Confidence that we will be able to bear up under the gaze of the holy, all-powerful, righteous, and just judge comes from receiving by faith what God has done to supply the righteousness sufficient for such a day, the day of judgment.

And what has he done? Well, the apostle says, The righteousness of God has been manifested. It has been manifested through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction, he says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation or an appeasing and atoning sacrifice to be received by faith.

You see, when we offer the gospel, we offer salvation. We offer salvation from divine wrath. And it's a magnificent offer, a gracious offer that comes from the God who, out of love, did all that was necessary to save us from himself.

So when a person seizes hold of the gift of salvation by faith, they can have assurance, a firm hope of eternal life. Rather than being turned away from the presence of that holy God to spend an eternity in hell, that one is embraced as a father embraces a lost, beloved child.

[4 : 23] But is there more to salvation? Is there more than eternal life, as wonderful as that is? Well, Paul would seem to say so when he says, and from the passage that we read, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

See, we're going to pray in just a moment, but I intend to consider our salvation under three headings. First, our salvation is not something we work for, but something we work out.

It is a gift to be explored and enjoyed. Secondly, our salvation, when worked out fully, will enable us to fully love. We will actually walk in joyful liberty of all that God has commanded.

And our salvation is something that is worked out in community, through relationships with other people. To love is to serve. Let's pray. Lord God, please help me to articulate your word well, Lord, to rightly divide the word of truth, to be able to communicate it to my brothers and sisters here, so that together, we will grow in the salvation that you have purchased for us out of your grace and mercy.

And so we commit our ears and our hearts and our minds into your care, Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So let's consider this first heading. Our salvation is not something we work for, but something we work out.

[6 : 01] It is a gift to be explored and enjoyed. This is a jigsaw puzzle. And you know, if you've ever done a jigsaw puzzle, we started to get them here.

My wife has discovered Wentworth puzzles. I don't know if you know what those are. They're beautifully made, crafted jigsaw puzzles made down in England. And this is not a Wentworth, but it's a product.

It's a birth of that movement within my wife's heart. Well, you know how this works, right? If you were to receive this from Barbara as a gift, you would get the gift, and then you would sit down at the table, open up the box, put the pieces out, and you would begin to work out that gift.

See, it's a good analogy to what Paul is talking about here. We receive salvation as a gift. It's not something that we can earn or work for. It's something that's given to us, but there is a working out of it.

So like this puzzle, you have this picture of this owl. I think it's a marsh owl. It's a marsh owl. And so all the pieces in this box add up to that picture.

[7 : 11] And you receive the gift. It's yours. And now work it out. So this is an analogy to the distinction that Paul makes in his exhortation.

We receive salvation as a gift. Now, he says, work it out. See, the tendency of human beings, if they care about salvation, and they should, if they care about it, it's to think that it's something that they work to obtain, that we must prove to God that we are worthy of being in his presence, worthy of receiving his favor.

That is a vain enterprise. It's like trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon. We cannot think that we are somehow able to stand before a God who is so pure because we are so marred by sin that we'll never be able to clean ourselves up enough in his presence to not be consumed by his brightness, the glory of his being.

We have as much chance in the presence of God, in our own strength, and in our own righteousness, as an ice cream cone does in the searing heat of the Sahara Desert.

It's not going to happen. He must provide a way for us to be there in his presence on that moment, and he has provided a way.

[8 : 35] Listen to what the apostle says. For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person, one would even dare to die.

But God chose his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. See, it's not what we do, but what he did.

And that cannot be more explicitly stated than when Paul teaches elsewhere, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

So Paul, in any passage, or any of the other writers of the New Testament, or Jesus himself, never says that salvation is something that you work for.

Salvation is a gift. But having received that gift, it is something that we work out. See, like the puzzle, through our being joined to Christ by faith, all the pieces that make up the whole picture are available to us.

[9 : 42] What does Peter say? His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his glory and excellence. See, and we are urged to pursue that final picture, as it were, knowing that God is at work, creating in us the desire to do his will.

Work out your own salvations, as Paul says, with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So the gift is not only salvation from judgment on the final day, it also includes salvation every day.

salvation every day from who we were without Christ and who we were without the presence of the Holy Spirit on our lives. See, our salvation is not something we work for, but something we work out.

It is a gift to be explored and enjoyed. And we get to explore and enjoy what it's like to live as we were created to live and as we have been redeemed to live because of our salvation.

So secondly, our salvation, when worked out fully, will enable us to fully love. We will actually walk in joyful obedience of all that God has commanded.

[11 : 03] See, when you go to work out the gift of the puzzle, what do you do? Well, more than likely, what you do is you take the cover off the box and you sit it up in front of you and you begin to take the pieces out and compare it.

It doesn't go there. It might go there. I'll put that one over there. We begin to look at the picture and that begins to decide where we think the pieces belong. Well, again, it's an analogy.

In a similar way, God has provided a picture of what our salvation looks like and it looks like Jesus. He is the picture. He is the image that the puzzle of who we are is being formed into.

For those whom he foreknew, the apostle says, those he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And what is that image? Well, the writer of Hebrews says, he, Jesus, is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature. Paul calls him an icon, an image of God.

[12 : 07] Jesus refers to himself as if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. So as we study Jesus, the image of what we are being formed into, his teaching and his actions, what do we see?

Well, Christopher Walken suggests this. If you were asked to select only one theme from Jesus' teaching on which to expand, what would it be? We could, I think, do a lot worse than choose love.

Love is the epicenter of the distinctively Christian way of being in the world. Not power, respect, tolerance, not equality, justice, freedom, enlightenment, or submission.

Love is the overall shape of Christian ethics, the form of human participation in the created order. Love is the form of human participation in the created order.

We are to love. Now, how can we confirm Walken's assertion? Well, we read it there in Mark. It was one of those times when somebody comes and wants to discuss the great commandment.

[13 : 15] What is the greatest commandment? What's the most important commandment? And so he comes and asks Jesus and Jesus turns around and says, well, this is what the most important commandment is. The Lord your God, our Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.

And the second is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And Walken concludes, more than any other predisposition, social attitude, or concept, love most distinguishes the ethics of the kingdom of God.

Love. So let's go back to Paul's exhortation. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

If the law of the kingdom of God is love, summarize as Jesus does, all the law of the prophets, it's love, love of God, love of neighbor. If the law of the kingdom of God is love, love of God, love of neighbor, and God is at work in us, creating both the will and the desire to accomplish what brings him pleasure, then I think what it means to work out our salvation is to discover more and more what it means to love.

love. And to put it another way, we have been saved by love to love, to love God and our neighbor. Now why does God categorize the kingdom of God and its king, the Lord Jesus, as he does?

[14 : 47] Because God is love. We hear that several times in the scripture. Not that God is loving, though he is loving, and we learned already about how it is that he's expressed his love, but God is love.

As John writes in his epistle, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

Love is from God because God is love. His divine nature is love and the love that he expresses in multitudinous ways emanates from him because he is love.

And therefore, the source of all that is truly love is God himself because he is love. So when God acts to save, we poor, lost human beings, it's generated by love because God is love.

When we say that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believed in him should not perish but have everlasting life, that love is evident in the world through the gift of Jesus because God himself is love.

[15 : 58] When Jesus acts to accomplish all that needs to be accomplished by humbling himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death as we read there in Philippians, even death on a cross, it's generated by love.

Jesus says, greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends. See, God's love is not prompted by our loveliness. God's love expresses itself in grace and it expresses itself because he is love.

Paul writes, for all we were still weak at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. No one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die. Listen again, but God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He didn't love us because we were lovely. He loved us because he is love. All of this was done, this work of love that emanates from God who is love.

All this was done out of love in order that we might love. See, all of this has brought us back into relationship with God. God is the one who created us and how did he create us?

[17 : 10] In his image. We are the image bearers of God. We humans are supposed to exist on this earth in a manner that reflects back, reminds, directs, people to God, the one who has made us in his image.

More than one person has said that Samuel, our beloved grandson, looks a lot like me and isn't, I think that's a really fortunate thing for him. And they also say that I look, that Matthias looks a little bit like me again.

He couldn't have done better. But when you look then at me and you look at Matthias and then you look at Samuel, particularly around the ears, you'll notice that we all have very big ears and that we share other traits.

So in some way, Samuel reflects back on Matthias, Matthias reflects back on me. We, as it were, they are image bearers, if we could say he's so bold as to say kind of like me.

And in that respect, as we are created by God, we are image bearers ourselves. Because what happens when somebody looks at Samuel and they look at Matthias and they look at me and they say, oh, yeah, I see, you're all of the same lineage.

[18 : 15] Yeah, you share traits. That's what's supposed to happen when people look at us. We're image bearers of God. Now, my analogy is a poor analogy, but it's not completely unhelpful.

We have been made in God's image. We share traits, attributes, that will be recognized by others. And, if the one in whose image we are made is love, and if by faith in Jesus, who is God incarnate and therefore love incarnate, we have been brought back into relationship to the one in whose image we have been created, and that having been brought back into relationship is due to the fact that he is love and that if renewed and that renewed relationship is the source of renewing the image of God in us that was marred due to sin, and if the renewing of that image looks more and more like Jesus, sharing more and more of the traits of Jesus who himself fulfilled all righteousness, that is the greatest commandment to love God and neighbor.

It follows that our salvation is a salvation by love to love. So when we are called to work out our salvation, it's not fundamental, it has, it's the most fundamental motivating force and shape will be found in love.

Now, lest we think that the love we have been saved by is to some saved by and for that we are to work out as some sort of sentimental, all-affirming, never-judging, blithe-eyed rationalization of human folly.

We need to look at the love expressed on the cross. The cross is not sentimental. The cross is active. It is pointed. It is sufficient love.

[19 : 59] It is measured not by the sin-influenced desires or prejudices of fallen human beings, but by the need of those for whom it was enacted. You know, you think of the famous story of the Good Samaritan.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is God's love portrayed in human terms. God's love portrayed in human terms. Do you remember what prompted that?

It was another time in the discussion about what's the greatest commandment. Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said, what's written in the law? How do you read it? He answered, you shall love the Lord God with all of your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

And Jesus said to him, you've answered correctly. Do this, and you will live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor?

See, in an effort to set limits on love's obligation, he expected Jesus to echo rabbinic teaching that limited love's obligation to particular people in particular situations.

[21 : 00] Jesus shatters this expectation when he makes love based upon need, not preference or deserving, because true love reflects the God who is love.

Remember what Paul says, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were enemies of God, Christ died for us. We quote, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

And you know, when you take that term world, cosmos, that you find in the Gospel of John or in the writings of John, it isn't everything that's there. It's not all the people in the world.

It's God's enemy. D.A. Carson says, world is defined. When John tells us that God so loves the world, far from being an endorsement of the world, it is a testimony to the character of God.

God's love is to be admired, not because the world is so big, but because the world is so bad. God's love for the world is evident in the fact that he is willing to send his son into the midst of enemy territory to die for a bunch of rebels.

[22 : 13] God's love responds to need, not to preference, not to desire, but out of love. So love for neighbor is meant to be a reflection of God's love for us.

And it does not fit neatly into this well-ordered, prescribed lies. Again, let me quote from this fellow, Christopher Watkin. My neighbor, as a category, right? Love your neighbor.

My neighbor is an anarchic category. It doesn't follow the rules. It's a happenstance show, intrusion, into my carefully curated networks of family, friends, and co-works, an anomaly, not on my list of friends.

A subversive shuffling of the relational cards. We have to love our neighbor because he is there. A much more alarming reason for a much more serious operation. You think back on that story as Jesus, I believe, is portraying in human terms God's love.

He sees the man on the side of the road. They're at enmity with each other, the Samaritans and the Jews. The guy walks across the road, takes him up, spends his money, cares for him.

[23 : 22] That's God working on behalf of we who were rebels. So, we are created by God to love because we're created in God's image and God is love.

And our salvation, therefore, is that we've been rescued from being apart from God, that we might once again be joined to God through faith in Christ. And that life of God in us is going to do what? It's going to increase our capacity for love.

Loving God and loving neighbor. Because if we look back at how it all started, why this need was so great that Jesus would have to be obedient even to the point of death on the cross, what was the first thing that was done?

Love of God was rejected and love of neighbor was rejected. Human beings began to love themselves, turn inward, and the next thing we know, brother is killing brother.

That's why when our image is restored, when we come back into a relationship with God, we need to see that what God is at work in us, as Paul says, work it out, work it out, because God is working in you and what is he doing?

[24 : 25] He's helping us to actually love, to love God and to love our neighbor. The third heading I suggested was our salvation is something that is worked out in community through relationships with other people.

To love is to serve. To love is to serve. Again, if I can use the analogy of the puzzle only in a slightly different way.

One piece of a puzzle is no puzzle. If you open this box and you've got the whole picture and there's only one piece in there, you don't have the puzzle. One piece of the puzzle is no puzzle.

A puzzle is an adding together the various pieces that make up the whole. Each is unique and yet each piece is necessary for the making of the whole. What one does when working out the gift of the puzzle is check pieces in relationship to other pieces to see where and how it fits.

Then when you get it all done, each unique piece is still unique but it's playing a vital part but it finds its purpose, its value in the whole. You know what it's like when you do one of these and you get to the end and you're missing a piece?

[25 : 37] You go, you've got to be kidding me. You start digging through the sofa, you start looking under the tables, you find out the dog ate it but it's not a puzzle. The puzzle's not complete because every piece is necessary.

See, every piece of the puzzle has a relationship to the rest and in order for it to be whole, it needs to be in that relationship. In order to fulfill its purpose, in order to have its identity, it needs to be in relationship to those other pieces.

So you see where we're kind of going with this. Someone has said one Christian is no Christian. One Christian is no Christian. If we are a Christian, it means that we are in relationship because we have been saved by love to love and love requires relationship.

Now this is not to say that self-love is not important. Jesus does say that we are to love our neighbor as ourself and a healthy attitude toward our own life is good, but it is meant to be the measure by which you judge to what lengths you're willing to go in your love for others.

Self-preservation is the paradigm for the preservation of others. Self-preservation is the paradigm for the preservation of others. You know, if you were to read through Philippians, I encourage you to do it, it won't take long, do it tonight, I think you'd be amazed how much the letter either directly speaks to relationships or implies relationships.

[27 : 06] In fact, I would say that very little of the letter could be said it does not involve relationships. From the very beginning, Paul's opening, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and the deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is writing to a bunch of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. He has a relationship with them and he's referring to people that are in relationship with each other in that church. At the very end, he closes out, greet every saint in Christ Jesus.

The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those who are Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. And in between that opening and that closing, you have Paul saying such things, do nothing out of self and ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing. And as he explains why he sent back the letter with this fellow Epaphroditus, he says, he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

I am the more eager to send him therefore that you may rejoice at seeing him again. And then in chapter 4, he's entreating Euodia and Syntyche that they would agree they'd come back.

[28 : 17] Some falling out has happened. See, there is just relationships and relationships and relationships in this letter. And because that is the case, there needs to be love.

And perhaps that's why Paul, at the very beginning of his letter, says this, It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

He is praying that their love would abound. See, love is what is needed to inform their thinking, their actions so that on the day of judgment when they are able to present all the good fruit of their lives it will be to the praise and glory of a God who is love.

And where do we learn how to love others with whom we do not have a natural or preferential relationship? It's the church. The church.

Now why is God so concerned about our relationships? And why does he use relationships to shape us more and more into the image of Jesus who is divine love incarnate?

[29 : 30] Because God is the one in whose image we are created and that God dwells in loving relationship. See, Orthodox Christianity has asserted that the Bible reveals that the one true and living God is Trinitarian, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Nicene Creed, we believe in one God, Father of the Almighty, we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. Since God is love, we understand that God who made us exists in an eternal relationship of love.

The uniqueness of each person of the Godhead is not lost in the threeness of the Godhead and the threeness is never ruptured by the uniqueness of each person. And this suggests that if we are made in the image of God, then our individuality and our commonality are both important.

Our individuality is never to be lost in the many, nor are we to be preoccupied with our individuality to the point of the detriment of the other. We're not made to live as hermits, nor are we to be lost in the crowd.

I understand that over here you call them Where's Wally, the books? They're called Where's Waldo back in the United States. If you've ever seen those books, what are they? You open up a page and what are you doing?

[30 : 50] You're looking for Waldo and at first he just seems to be completely consumed by all the other people that are on the page until finally you look and you look and you look and there he is looking just like Wally.

He's an individual in the midst of the crowd. The crowd does not extinguish him so he is distinguishable from the crowd but at the same time he is in the midst of the crowd and that's true about us.

We are in relationship with other people. In fact, we have been saved by love to love. That's true for each one of us. Our salvation is personal. Our working out our salvation is unavoidably relational and that is so because God is personality dwelling in relationship.

And so like the puzzle, we are a particular piece in God's puzzle but we only discover our identity, image bearers of God who is love and find our purpose reflecting God in our own love for others in relation to all the other pieces.

One piece of a puzzle is not a puzzle. One Christian is not a Christian. So, when we talk about salvation, when we offer salvation in the gospel, what we are offering people is the ability for them to be united again to their image bearer, their creator.

[32 : 11] And that united him through faith in Christ, that life that is in Christ comes in them and what they begin to do is they begin to love. They love God and they love their neighbor.

We could have a litany of all the ways in which we think about our own actions and the actions of people around us and how just how unloving they are. How we don't pause and stop and say, you know what I'm about to say, can I really say this in love?

What I'm about to do, does it really express love? We have a problem with that and we have the spirit of Christ dwelling in us and we imagine what's going on around us.

However, by offering the gospel, what we are offering to them is the opportunity for them to experience what it's really like to live as an image bearer of God.

And if Nate's statistics are right, the proposed church plant out in Bears Den in Mulgai means that 99% of the people in that area do not live as they were created to live because they don't love as God has told us to love.

[33 : 18] We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind and our neighbor as ourself. That is, that we have the desire for their preservation as much as we do for our own.

So when we talk about mission here today, mission is a natural outworking of our salvation and that we want to be motivated by love. So for instance, if that church plant in Bears Den Mulgai is motivated by Nate's ego, he wants to be able to write home and say, hey, I started a church and that thing is really going.

Or if it's somehow, you know, motivated by the Kirk Session and says, you know, we want to be known as a church that plants churches. Now what wants to motivate us is the fact that there are 99% of the people who live there who don't live as they were created to live.

They need to be redeemed in order that they may begin to approach that reality in their life. See, if it's ego or if it's notoriety we're missing the mark. Those people are image bearers of God and out of love we want them to discover that.

To love God and their neighbor. It would be a revolution in Bears Den Mulgai. It would be something that would be written about in the annals of church history of the outpouring of the spirit and that people were outpouring their love towards one another.

[34 : 38] We can pray. We can labor towards that end. But the goal is to not have the articles written or the books written or the videos taken. The goal is that they would love. And in order for them to experience God's love we need to give it to them, show it to them.

Because God is love and all that he does emanates from that. And if we have ourselves image bearers of God growing in our love it will grow out of that as well. Saved by love to love to the glory of God.

Let's pray. Lord God thank you for the opportunity to consider just what you have done for us and I pray in some way shape or form that all that has been shared here will press us cause us to think about just how loving are we in our relationships that we might learn here first in the church what it's like what it's like to love as you love that it's not dependent upon upon it's dependent upon need it's not dependent on preference or desires it's dependent upon what is the need and how can I meet that need out of love and Lord if we can learn to do that here if we can if we can begin to press ourselves into the places of that kind of anarchic sort of response that category that you know these things just show up and you've got to respond Lord that we will have the freedom the liberty to do that because we will know God that it's you at work showing us how it is that we can learn to love like you and so I pray

God that you would enable us to respond in faith with humility and press forward in the high calling that you have for us to love you with all of our heart soul strength and mind and our neighbors ourself in the name of Jesus indeed divine love incarnate I pray amen here again for the you hello