

Matthew 22:37-40 "Creating and Holding Space: Embracing God's Love and Purpose"

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Preacher: Derrick Harris

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Okay, so part of me is being a musician. And so part of me sermonizing is trying to share that at times.

That's part of the sermon for me. I get the privilege of doing the next two weeks. We're going to be talking about God and neighbor. This morning we'll focus a little bit more on the God and move into the neighbor.

And the next week focus a little bit more on the neighbor. But music is a part of that for me. That song I wrote when I was in college. And it continues to morph.

It continues to grow. It continues to take on new meaning as I grow older. And music is like a gift from God, I do believe. If you're a musician, I think you understand he uses it in special ways in your life.

[1 : 00] And it allows an artist to create a space that captures a meaning, captures a moment, captures a purpose.

That's why you can go back to a song. You can listen to it and it just takes you somewhere. It could be a good thing. It could be a bad thing. It could be a special thing. And it's also a space then that can be shared with another person.

And so that particular song helps me focus on true meaning wherever I am when I get lost in my life. What I need most in my life is not a successful career.

It's not a large bank account or the best house, the best job, the best family. Fill in the blank, right, with whatever you have in your heart. What I need most is the truest source of life beyond me that sustains me, that drives me, that saves me, that propels me to keep going when my life seems lost, when my life is dark.

So after I graduated from the promised land of Auburn University, God took me back to Birmingham where I lived for six years.

[2 : 12] And during that time I got married to my wife Anna Catherine and then God called us to Washington, D.C. where we served for nine years. And during that time we had John Paul, we finished seminary, we walked through the death of loved ones, and that same source of love sustained us.

And then God called us from D.C. to serve in Nashville, Tennessee. And I shared some of that journey before with you. That was a tough one, a hard road, but that same source of love sustained us.

And then that had a happy ending because it led us to Huntsville, Alabama. And Huntsville, Alabama is space town, okay? On our way here, I will always remember the first thing that we saw was a rocket.

Remember the rocket that used to be on 65 and then it became really dangerous so they had to take it down? I saw that rocket. Our first year here we went to an event at Big Spring Park that was put on by NASA and I just thought that was the greatest thing.

I was like, this is really cool. There's t-shirt shops that have the coolest nerdy space things. I thought space is everywhere.

[3 : 29] And then Space Camp. I mean, I'd heard about it. I watched a movie in the 80s called Space Camp. Y'all probably don't know about this. But it's awesome. It's about this little robot that accidentally takes off from Space Camp and goes into orbit with kids.

That's like a kid's dream. And at the end it said, filmed in Huntsville, Alabama. I'm like, oh, wow. I'm here. I'm in Space Town. I'm going to space with a little robot.

But no, like this is a cool town. Space is everywhere. When I get my haircut, I call her Herica. Her name's Erica. But Herica likes to talk to me about whether or not the earth is round.

I'm like, okay. Space is everywhere. But this morning, I want you to think about just that word a little differently. Okay? Space. Just a little differently.

And I want to start by asking this question. Where did it come from? Okay? Where did space come from? I believe that God made space.

[4 : 31] Okay? If we read in Genesis 1, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, God created space.

Okay? Isaiah 40 continues. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span?

Do you know what a span was? Span is a measurement. It's the distance between here and here. So imagine that. Imagine just how powerful God must be with that imagery that all of space could be contained in that measurement.

His immense size, his glory. It's far beyond what we can even comprehend. God made space. It's pretty amazing.

I mean, we can't even fathom how glorious it is. But what did he do with it after he created it?

[5 : 40] What did he do with space after he made it? He gave it away. He gave it away to his creation. He put us on this space called earth.

He gave away the sun. He gave away the moon. He gave away the ground under my feet. He gave me eyes to see the space. To see the sun. To see the moon.

To see the ground. To see the plants. To see the animals. And then he gave man and woman space to be a part of the blessedness of the creation.

His space. Eat the fruit, he said. He shared that space with them. Name the animals, he said. He shared that space with them. Steward the earth.

He shared that space with them. Walk with me in the garden. He shared that space with them. So it appears that scripture begins with the blessing of the creation of space.

[6 : 39] And then God gives that space away to us. Now think about this for a minute. Who was the first evangelist?

Who was the first one to create a space for God's love to be shared with someone who needed it? Someone who was hiding in a place of darkness? Who was the first evangelist? God. How did God as the first evangelist give away that space?

God. How did God as the first evangelist give away that space? In Genesis 3.9. God turned to Adam. Who was hiding, afraid, exposed. And he asked a very simple question.

Where are you? That's the mother of all questions. Where are you? Where am I? Where are you hiding?

[7 : 46] You think that God didn't know where Adam was? The one who created that space that we saw? You think he didn't know? No, he knew. He knew. But he made space for the creation to interact in that moment.

God made space. And God holds space for us. God holds space for us. God holds space for us. God holds space for us. And in that space, God holds space for us.

God holds space for us. God gives us space for us. God gives us space for us. God gives us space for us. God gives us space for us. And that space that he holds, we find in Jesus. Now, let me tell you about my wife for a second.

Okay? if you came to our house and you opened our drawers, you would notice an organization level that exceeds me. She has a gift of clean and organized. It's just if that were a spiritual gift, she's got it. But if you opened up my drawer, you might make the mistake of thinking that I was organized. But I had nothing to do with that organization in that drawer.

[9 : 24] In fact, if you go to my area of the house, like this, and you open that little door, you walk in there, it's just music equipment and just junk. But she went in there and she organized that too. So now you would make the mistake of thinking I'm just completely organized in all that I do. I am not. But I get the gift of that organization in the space that I live in that she shares with me. And isn't it cool to think that the one who created space and who's holding space in his hands holds and shares his space with us. And he says it's a place of rest, place of rest, place of non-anxious

presence. Where does that exist today? An unhurried place of peace and rest for your souls. Obviously there's an eternal component, but there's also a temporal component that we can experience that now in this world that's crazy, busy, and fast.

And here's what that space looks like. Grace. Grace. It's a word we hear a lot here. He somewhere spoke. I love it when they say that, by the way, in the Bible. He somewhere spoken.

You scripture memorizers can't remember where it is? It's okay. It's in the Bible. They can't either. For he has somewhere spoken somewhere in the Bible, but I know what he says. And God rested on the seventh day.

And since therefore it remains for some to enter it, those who formerly receive the good news. This is not the right verse. How did that even get in there? He somewhere said, let's go to the right verse here. I'm looking for Hebrews 4, 4 through 6.

There we go. No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

[11:41] For we don't have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. Right? But we have one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. And here's the space right here. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace.

That we might receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. You see, that's the source.

That's the source. Have you walked into God's non-anxious, restful presence lately?

Have you experienced it? And if God made space and then he shared it with us, and it's a space of grace and non-anxious presence and love, don't you think maybe he might want us to share space too with others?

Pastor Derek, what do you mean by sharing space with others? The nudge. You familiar with the nudge?

I was at Chick-fil-A one day. And I had clearly finished my order earlier than the person in the other lane.

[12:56] And they said, thank you, you may pull forward. I go to pull forward, no. He nudged. And he stopped right there. And he would not let me in.

And he ordered after I ordered. So I sat there with my phone and I held it up and just stared at him. And he did this, like this, the whole time. And I'm sitting there like that. I took a picture and I posted it on social media because that's the only way to get anything done today.

And all my problems went away after I posted it. Every one of them. But he did the nudge. Right?

He took my place first and it was my place.

I was entitled to that place. So think about this though. Even though you have these places in your life, right? These parking spots, so to speak.

Because if you hadn't done it at Chick-fil-A, you've probably experienced it like the grocery store.

Perhaps it's someone that you're racing to get a parking spot and then you run into them at church. That's the worst. Right?

[13:59] But we've all got these parking spots in our lives that we can give up every day, so to speak. Right? Where we work, where we eat, where we go to school, where we vacation, where we rest.

And when we give them up, we can create space for other people. And in that way, we hold space for other people. Okay? It's a space that's rightfully ours, but it's a space that now becomes sacred and set apart because we give it away for the sake of someone else.

And maybe in that space is some grace that someone else can experience God's love where they may be hiding, where they may be hurting, and when you give it away, something happens.

Okay? Something happens. So God made space. He shares it with us. It's a non-anxious place.

And God wants us to hold space for each other.

Now this is the main verse that we'll talk about this week and next week. It's a very short verse.

Don't worry. And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

[15:08] This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

So the greatest commandment from the mouth of Jesus, what does he say? It begins with the call to make space for God.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. And then your neighbor is yourself. So these two are extremely related. But what does that mean? Right? How do we love God with all our heart, soul, mind?

It means that we give ourselves wholly to him. It means when we answer that question, where are you? By saying, right here. Right here.

And you're invited. You're invited to come in. And here's why it matters. Because the greatest commandment reveals the source of our ultimate purpose as human beings.

[16:12] Holding space for God's love and holding space for each other. Loving the Lord God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Come inside. I give myself wholly to you. And then loving our neighbor as ourself.

Sharing that love and that space with someone else. Now on that note, can we just talk about vampires for a second? Are you all familiar with what a vampire is?

Vampire Christians? Yeah? I'm not going to tell you what it is. But like, are you familiar with what a vampire Christian is? Ever heard of that?

So, there's a guy named Dallas Willard. And he writes a lot of books. And here's what he says about vampire Christians.

Vampire Christians say to Jesus, I'd like a little of your blood, please. But I don't care to be your student or have your character. Thank you for saving me.

[17:12] But now, won't you just excuse me while I get on with my life? And I'll see you in heaven. Do you think that's what Jesus meant by love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind?

But what did he mean? He meant inviting the Spirit of God into your darkness of your heart. He meant asking the Lord to reorganize your life.

Perhaps so you could be with Jesus more. So you can become like Jesus. And maybe even do some of those things that he says that we should do if we're his disciples. Okay, and here's the thing.

It's the work of the Holy Spirit. God does all the work. You know what is sanctification. What is sanctification? It's the work of God's free grace. Where we're renewed in the whole man after the image of God.

And are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness. It's the work of the Spirit. Lord, come in here. Search me. Make me like you. I want to become like you. I want to do the things that you did.

[18:17] I want to treat people the way that you treat them. But it's his love flowing through you. But we live in a world where there are a lot of vampires.

Vampire Christians. So you've got to think about that. But Jesus said, blood, Lord God, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And your neighbor as yourself.

So I was eating at Taco Mama one day. And a woman came up to me and she said, hey, Derek. Not sorry.

She didn't say, hey, Derek. She said, hey, what's your name? I said, Derek. And she said, well, what's your last name? I said, Harris. She goes, well, you probably noticed me sitting back there just kind of staring.

And I go, no. And she said, I thought you were my brother. I go, really? She's like, yes. I was like, well, maybe he's down here.

[19:20] He didn't tell me. He's a policeman. I thought sometimes maybe he comes down here. You just look so much like my brother. She just kept staring. And for whatever reason, God put it on my heart to stop and say, let me.

I take it you haven't seen your brother in a while. No. I said, come here. Just walked over to her, put my arm around her. I said, on behalf of your brother, I love you.

God bless you. You have no idea how much I needed to hear that. No idea. And I said, yes, I do. Yes, I do.

See, God sent somebody into my space that day. But he ended up showing me his love through that process. And his love was the source of even noticing that person.

It was a gift. The whole moment was a gift. And his love was the only reason I was even able to stop thinking of me and my agenda and what I was doing in that moment to just say, hey, this is the moment.

[20 : 25] And he used me in that moment. He shared his spirit of love through me. And it allowed me to be a vessel of encouragement to somebody else.

But he did all the work. And in that moment, I know life was impacted. And he'll do that with you. God made space and he holds space for us and he wants us to hold space for each other. Wants us to give it up. Think about this to end here. What space does God share with us besides earth?

Redemptive space. Right? How? How does he share redemptive space? By sharing something that's rightfully his. The life of his son, Jesus.

He didn't have to. But he did. Imagine how much that hurt. Imagine seeing his son on the cross and turning his head.

[21 : 31] Because it's what had to happen for him to share his love with us. While he died on that cross. But something powerful happened when he shared that, right? Life.

Resurrection life. Forgiveness of sins for those who come to him and ask for that light of love. Invited into their hearts. Cover my sins of darkness.

Clothe me where I'm hiding. Be my life. Be my source of salvation. And if Christ is your source of salvation today, then you now are God's vessels of encouragement.

And when you live that out, something powerful happens. You experience God. And you see him at work. And you see him change the humanity that he has come here to save.

And he does it by his spirit working through you. I don't know of any greater thing. But it starts by loving the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

[22 : 34] Is there any greater resource that we are given and shared with that's freely ours than that? I know of not one. But I want to encourage you there this week.

Because the greatest commandment reveals the source of our ultimate purpose. Your ultimate purpose. My ultimate purpose. To love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And our neighbor as ourselves. That is life. That's it. That's what you're looking for. That's it. Jesus said it. Hold space for God. And then hold space for each other.

Is God the source of your life and purpose? And how might he be calling you this week to be a vessel of encouragement to somebody else? Now come back next week.

I'm going to talk more about the neighbor piece. In fact, Debbie just probably should do all the talking. Because that was incredible what you said. So it would be great to go here today and learn from her.

[23 : 32] And then we will continue this discussion next week. About loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And then neighbor as ourselves. So I love you. Start there. Where can you? Father, thank you for sharing your space with us that we don't deserve.

Thank you, Jesus, for willingly come here to die for us. Father God, thank you for sending him. Holy Spirit, thank you for filling us, renewing us, and giving us new life.

Great God, would you use us as your vessels of encouragement and mercy. That we may lead others to the throne of grace. That we too may define success. Not in numbers and money and jobs.

But Lord, by being with people when they're hurting. Because you're with us in our heart. Thank you. Thank you, Holy Spirit.

Give this time to you. Transform us. Renew us. Thank you in Christ's holy name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

[24 : 38] We'll see you in the next one. Thank you.

Henry's■.