**1 Thessalonians 3:11-13**

slide 1

**Love One Another & All People**

***9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?***

 ***11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.***

* Last week we examined Paul’s joyful and immediate response to the news that Timothy had brought to him from Thessalonica . . . news that the Thessalonian church was **not only surviving, amidst their persecution, but that they were thriving**.
	+ And following the reception of this great news, Paul immediately pens this letter in response.
* As we saw last week, Paul expresses his personal thanks to God by asking the rhetorical question in v. 9-10 . . . ***9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?***
	+ As I said last week, **there is nothing that Paul, or we, can do to render sufficient thanks to God for all of the wonderful blessings that He bestows upon us daily**.
	+ For Paul, who had been suffering, mentally, under the strain of not knowing what was happening in Thessalonica, this statement in v. 9 is particularly appropriate.
	+ Having become despondent and having slowed down his evangelism activities while he waited for word from Timothy, Paul is once again reinvigorated and grateful to God for having protected the Thessalonians.
* In v. 10 Paul expresses to the Thessalonians his two specific prayer requests in regard to the Thessalonians . . . **that God permit to be allowed to see them, once again, face to face** and that **God would give him the opportunity to return to Thessalonica to complete his spiritual instruction to them.**

**Outline**

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* Now, we come to the closing verses of this second major section of this letter with Paul’s expression of his personal petition to God on behalf of himself and the Thessalonians.
	+ Specifically, **v. 11 is Paul’s expression of his prayer-wish for himself**, Timothy and Silas . . . **that God would permit them to return to Thessalonica**.
	+ v. 12-13 is **Paul’s prayer-wish for the Thessalonians** . . .
		- With v. 12 being Paul’s **specific petition** for them
		- And v. 13 being the expression of **the desired result**, based upon Paul’s specific desire.

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**Observations of the passage**

* As we examine this passage this morning, I want to point out a couple of things.
	+ **First** of all, this is not a prayer.
		- While Paul speaks of the things that he has been praying for, he does not address God the Father and the Lord Jesus directly. Instead, he refers to them in the third person.
		- In other words, Paul is telling the Thessalonians the content of his prayers in regard to his desires for them.
	+ **Second**, in expressing his desires for himself and the Thessalonians, Paul uses verbs in the **optative mood**.
		- The **optative mood** is used **to express a wish or a desire**, without the assurance that the thing hoped for will actually occur.
		- Specifically, the optative mood is used in Paul’s wish in v. 11 . . . ***may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you***.
		- The second and third optative mood verbs are found in v. 12 when Paul expresses his desire for the Thessalonians . . . ***and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people.***
	+ Note in all three of these optative mood verbs that Paul is expressing his own personal wish or desire that **God will act to fulfill these wishes**.
		- But at the same time that Paul is expressing his wishes, here in the expression of these desires Paul acknowledges that **only God has the power . . . the sovereign authority . . . to accomplish these things. Paul has no power over these matters.**
		- And despite the fact that he doesn’t know if his desires will be granted by God, Paul expresses them so that the Thessalonians will know the depths of his feeling for them.

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**Paul’s prayer-wish for himself**

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***v. 11— Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you***

* In expressing his desires in regard to the Thessalonians, **Paul begins in v. 11 by expressing his prayer-wish for himself, Silas and Timothy** . . . ***Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you***.
* Here in this very personal plea, Paul expresses his hope that God will see fit to allow the missionaries to return to Thessalonica.
* Once again, I feel that the English translation loses some of the meaning. In this personal wish, when Paul says, ***may God direct our way to you***, the phrase ***direct our way*** literal means ***fully straighten the road***.
	+ In other words, Paul is saying, ***now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord fully straighten our road to you.***
	+ With this phrase Paul uses **the metaphor of a crooked, winding road**, indicating that God’s **current** will for the present road back to Thessalonica was to be a long, winding road with many obstructions and detours.
* Paul’s use of this metaphor of a “crooked road” brings to mind the similar words of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:13 . . .

***Ecclesiastes 7:13(KJV)— Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?***

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* + In Ecclesiastes 7:13 Solomon makes the very significant theological point regarding the will of God that **if God has ordained that a person’s “road of life” is to be crooked, then there is no one on earth who has the ability to make that crooked road straight**.
		- If God has placed obstructions in our path, only God can remove those obstructions.
		- Sometimes God’s obstructions are mere inconveniences, but sometimes God’s obstructions in our road of life fully block our intended path and force us to take another route.
* This statement of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:13 is the basis of the classic Christian book by Thomas Boston entitled, *“The Crook in the Lot.”*
	+ In his book, Boston offers very insightful wisdom regarding the application of Ecclesiastes 7:13. Boston makes the point that **God has ordained every person’s “lot” in life. And each person’s lot in life is to travel the road that God has ordained and set us upon. And nobody has a straight, unobstructed path of life. Every single person has to travel a “crooked path” of life.**
	+ For example, the person born with a disabling handicap . . . the person born in a country run by a tyrannical dictator . . . the person born into great privilege . . . the child born to a mother whose husband has died before ever getting to see his child . . . the child left orphaned by the death of parents in a car crash . . . **every road of life that a person is placed upon by God is placed there by the sovereign will of God.**
	+ And not only has God placed each of us on a specific road of life, but God has also ordained all the many twists and turns that road will take during the course of our life.
	+ King Solomon’s wisdom . . . and Thomas Boston’s purpose in writing his book . . . is to teach us that we should do as Solomon advises and ***consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?***
		- Our lot in life . . . the crook in our lot . . . is the work of God. And if God has ordained a specific path our life is to take, rather than trying to ***make straight what God has made crooked . . .*** that is, to rebel and resist against God’s will . . . we should ***consider the work of God***. We should strive to learn the lessons that God has for us to learn and to accept our lot in life without rebelling or grumbling against God.
* One of my favorite stories about the will of God and the providence of God is in the story of Esther.
	+ Esther was an orphaned Jewish girl who was brought up by her uncle Mordecai. Mordecai and Esther were part of the Jewish exiles that had been taken into captivity in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.
	+ In the story of Esther, the queen of the Medo-Persian King, Vashti, had been removed from her position as queen when the King became enraged with her. Eventually Esther catches the eye of the king and he takes her to be his queen, although the king does not know she is a Jew.
	+ After Esther becomes queen, Mordecai learns of a plot by the evil official, Haman, to have all the Jews killed. Mordecai sends word to Esther so that she will intercede with the king. But Esther is afraid because it was not permitted for the queen to go to see the king unless she had been summoned. For her to go the king without being summoned exposed her to his wrath and she could be executed. So, naturally, Esther is reluctant and expresses her reluctance to Mordecai. In response, Mordecai tells Esther something that perfectly explains what every person’s response should be when faced with a difficult decision. In Esther 4:13-14 we read . . .

***Esther 4:13-14— 13 Then Mordecai told Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"***

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* + You see, Esther’s lot in life was to become queen of the Medo-Persian empire. And as queen, she would be in a position to intercede on behalf of the Jews, to prevent the genocide that Haman planned. But, as Mordecai points out, if Esther failed and shrank back in fear, God would still save the Jews, but Esther and her house would suffer loss.
* For Paul, he accepted the fact that his lot in life was to suffer separation from the Thessalonian brethren, at least for a time. But while he accepted his lot in life, he did not live life with a fatalistic resignation that he would never return to Thessalonica. Instead, Paul continued to pray that God would, one day, allow him to return to them.
* So, with a hopeful attitude, in v. 11 Paul expresses his wish that God would see fit to grant his desire to return to Thessalonica.

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**Paul’s prayer-wish for the Thessalonians**

***v. 12— and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;***

* Then, in v. 12-13 Paul proceeds to express his desire for how God would work in the lives of the Thessalonians. In v. 12 Paul makes **a specific petition to God on behalf of the Thessalonians . . . *and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;***
* Employing two optative mood verbs, Paul expresses his wish that the Thessalonians would both ***increase and abound in love*** . . .
* While the words ***increase*** and ***abound*** have similar meanings, they are different.
	+ The word ***increase*** means “to increase in abundance,” while the word ***abound*** means “to abundantly overflow.”
	+ Paul’s use of these two optative verbs expresses his heart-felt desire that God would generously give the Thessalonians the grace of abundant, overflowing love.

**Who did Paul wish that they would love?**

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***v. 12— and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;***

* But as we see that Paul is wishing for God to pour out an abundance of overflowing love in the hearts of the Thessalonians, **it is the object of their love that we should take note of**.
	+ Notice in v. 12 that Paul says . . . ***and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;***
* The obvious question that arises in this wish is . . . **who is “*all people*”?**
	+ And with this question, we are reminded of the interaction between Jesus and a Jewish lawyer in Luke 10:25-29 . . .

***Luke 10:25-29— 25 And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" 27 And he answered, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And He said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” 29 But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"***

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* + Here in Luke 10:29 the Jewish lawyer is attempting to equivocate. **With his question, “who is my neighbor?” the lawyer wishes to make a distinction between those people he desires to *love* and those he does not.**
	+ In response to his attempt to equivocate, Jesus then tells the lawyer the parable of The Good Samaritan . . .

***Luke 10:30-37— 30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robber’s hands?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."***

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* By his question, ***“who is my neighbor?”*** we see that the Jewish lawyer wanted to differentiate between those whom he wished to consider to be a neighbor . . . those people he liked . . . and those whom he did not. But in His parable of The Good Samaritan, Jesus teaches him . . . and us . . . that whether we know, or even like, another person is not a valid reason not to demonstrate love toward that person.

* Here in 1 Thessalonians 3:12 the apostle Paul is making the same point that Jesus makes in the parable of The Good Samaritan . . . it is our Christian duty to demonstrate ***love for one another and for all people***.
* Demonstrating ***love for one another*** . . . for Christian brethren . . . is much easier to do than demonstrating ***love*** for people we don’t know, or people we don’t like.
	+ And, to make Paul’s wish even more difficult to fulfill, is the reality of the situation in Thessalonica, where the church was under active and severe persecution.
* D. Edmond Hiebert makes an important statement regarding Paul’s hope that ***the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people***.

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* + Hiebert points out that ***love for all people*** is *“not merely for Christians, but all men generally.* ***For the persecuted Thessalonians, this meant also loving their enemies****, as Christ commanded.* ***To show love to their persecutors was the true safeguard against the natural tendency to retaliate when mistreated by outsiders.*** *Such a love is not natural to man. It can be known and practiced only as it is received as a gift from the Lord and made to increase and abound by Him.”*
* When I read that statement by Hiebert, I was struck by the fact that **of all the things that Paul could have wished for the Thessalonians in this letter, the most important thing on his mind for them was that they *increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people***.
* But the instruction to the Thessalonians is not unique to this letter or even to the apostle Paul.
	+ As we just read in Luke 10, Jesus quotes from the Shema of Deuteronomy 6 . . . ***you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.***

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* + - The two commands of the Shema . . . to love God and to love your neighbor . . . are a distillation of The Ten Commandments.
		- The first 4 commandments instruct us on how to love God, and the next 6 commandments instruct us on how we are to love one another.
	+ Building upon the Lord’s instruction, in Romans 13:8-10 Paul instructs . . .

***Romans 13:8-10— 8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, "you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.***

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* + In one of the best-known passages of Scripture . . . 1 Corinthians 13 . . . the apostle Paul explains that the possession and exercise of spiritual gifts is of no value if they are not exercised **in love, for the benefit of others**. In part, 1 Corinthians 13 says . . .

***1 Corinthians 13:1, 4-7— 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

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* + In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes . . .

***Galatians 5:14— For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."***

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* + In 1 Timothy 1:5 Paul reminds Timothy . . .

***1 Timothy 1:5— But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.***

* + In James 2:8 the Lord’s brother, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, also quotes the Shema when he says . . .

***James 2:8— If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.***

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* + In his first epistle, the apostle John instructs on the need for love throughout all five chapters. For example . . .

***1 John 4:7— Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.***

* + In his first epistle, the apostle Peter instructs . . .

***1 Peter 4:6-8— 6 For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God. 7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.***

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* Of the passages I just read concerning biblical instruction regarding love, I want to point out that the last passage . . . 1 Peter 4:6-8 . . . makes a point that compliments Paul’s instruction here in 1 Thessalonians 3:12.
	+ In Peter’s passage, he makes the very important point that **the gospel is preached to those who are spiritually dead. And yet, despite the fact that a person may presently be spiritually dead, *they may live in the spirit* if that is *according to the will of God****.*
* We have to remember that each of us was once that spiritually dead person in need of the gospel.
	+ **Those who most desperately need to hear the message of the gospel are those who, by virtue of their unbelief, stand in a state of condemnation before God.**
	+ **And our own personal histories attest to the fact that those who are unbelievers and enemies of Christ today are our brothers and sisters in Christ tomorrow.**

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**What is love?**

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* Now, at this point I want to pause and once again remind you of **what love is**.
	+ The world defines love as a romantic and affectionate emotion. In other words, the world defines love as **a feeling.**
	+ On the other hand, the Bible defines love as **doing something for the benefit of another, without regard for oneself.** In other words, **biblical love is doing something for the benefit of another. Feelings or emotions are not the motivation. Doing something to benefit another person is the motive.**
* In the case of the Thessalonian church, Paul knew that they were under great persecution by the Jews and the Gentiles. Facing such affliction, **the most natural human reaction would be to hate and seek revenge against their tormentors.**
	+ But instead of giving in to their carnal and sinful desire to seek retribution and revenge on their enemies, Paul and Peter both instruct their readers to **fervently pray for and love your enemies.**
	+ After all, if you truly wish the best for those who hate and persecute you . . . if you are fervently praying for their salvation . . . it is impossible to hate them. The two are mutually exclusive. You can either hate or love, but you can’t do both.
	+ Paul and Peter are teaching us to love and not hate our persecutors.
* **Who knows, the person who is persecuting you today may be your brother or sister in Christ tomorrow.**
	+ Paul knew this to be true because his own testimony was of being a man who hated Christ and who was the most zealous persecutor of the early church. But after meeting Jesus on the Damascus Road, Paul became the Lord’s greatest champion.
* I have to tell you, as I studied this and wrote my notes for this message, I realized just what a struggle I, personally, have with this instruction. So often **I don’t love my enemies**.
	+ When I see what is going on in the world . . . the ungodliness and persecution of Christians . . . the increasing intensity of opposition to anything having to do with God . . . the growing godless influence upon our society . . . I find it difficult not to hate what I see.
	+ Our society is degenerating to the point that we now are a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. And I hate it. I find myself despising the people who are dragging the world toward judgment and tribulation.
* But Jesus . . . and Paul . . . and Peter . . . and James . . . and John all teach us that **the only proper response toward those who hate Christ and hate us is to love them by praying for their salvation.** After all, as Paul reminds us in Romans 5:8 . . .

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***Romans 5:8— But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***

* Likewise, the apostle John says . . .

***1 John 4:10— In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.***

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***1 John 4:19— We love, because He first loved us.***

* The people of the world act in ungodly ways because that is what they are . . . they’re godless. They don’t have God or know God, so they act according to their nature. But we all were once the same . . . godless, heathen sinners.
* In his letter to the Ephesians, written several years after his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds the Ephesians of man’s condition before any of us believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior . . .

***Ephesians 2:1-5— 1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),***

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**The desired result**

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 ***v. 13— so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.***

* Then, having expressed his wish that God would ***cause* them *to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people***, Paul closes this passage by **stating the desired result of his prayer-wish** . . . ***so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.***
* It is important to note that Paul’s prayer-wish for the Thessalonians is that **God would *establish* their *hearts***.
	+ The word ***establish*** means “to make firm” or “to set firmly in place.” And the thing that Paul wishes is that God would firmly affix is their hearts.
	+ As Hiebert states, *“Christian stability is not achieved through outward conformity to rules and regulations, but through the development of conscious inner strength and stability.”*
		- **And such inner strength and stability can only come from God.**
* The desired result, as Paul expresses here in v. 13, is that the Thessalonians would not succumb to the desire to seek retribution upon those who hated and persecuted them. Instead, Paul’s prayer-wish is that by their obedience to Paul’s instruction, God would ***establish* their *hearts without blame in holiness***.

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* + **When Paul speaks of them being *without blame in holiness***, he is not saying that the Thessalonians can achieve personal holiness. After all, only God is holy.
	+ By his use of this phrase Paul is expressing his desire that the Thessalonians would live **lives that are separated from the love of the world and consecrated to God** . . . with the result that when the Lord Jesus returns ***with all His saints***, the Thessalonians would be found by the Lord to be ***holy and blameless before God***.
* Here in expressing his desire for the Thessalonians, Paul is simply saying that in the future, when the Lord returns for the church, ***with all His saints***, that the Thessalonians . . . as well as all Christians . . . will receive the words of commendation from the Lord, “well done, good and faithful servant,” when they appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.
* Such a wish is the wish of every Christian for every other Christian . . . that we be successful in consecrating our lives in obedience to the Lord, so that on the day when we appear before the Lord we will receive a crown reward for the life we lived here, in service to the Lord.

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* As I said a few minutes ago, it is very telling that of all the things that Paul could wish for the Thessalonian brethren, his greatest desire . . . already knowing that they were flourishing in their faith . . . was that they would take their faith and use it to love those people who did not yet know Christ.
	+ And the way each of us can love unbelievers is by sharing the truth of the gospel with them.
	+ Whether a person believes or not is not how we will be measured. Did you love people enough . . . were you faithful to Christ enough . . . that you told those who were perishing about Him?
	+ That is the act of true love . . . to tell someone who hates Christ and hates you about Jesus so as to be saved.

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* And having been granted salvation by God’s grace, we now give thanks in remembrance for what He gave to us by His death on the cross. It is the atoning sacrifice of Christ on our behalf that we remember and celebrate this morning as we come to the Lord’s Table.
	+ By taking in Himself the wrath of God on our behalf . . . by His death and resurrection . . . we are no longer under the judgment and wrath of God. We live because Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself for us.