

Fall Retreat 2022: Saturday Evening Session

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Preacher: Bauer Evans

[0 : 00] Well, Lord, we thank you that you are with us tonight. And so as we open your word, we thank you that the hope of glory, that Christ is in us, takes words that are written on a page and brings them to life.

And so we invite now, Spirit, your activity. Father, would you take your word and by the work of the Spirit shine your light on the life that we have and share in Christ.

We pray this in Jesus' name. And everybody said? Amen. Amen. For the last time, please open to Matthew chapter 5.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And you can also have your finger in Romans 8. We'll be reading verse 1 and verse 31 to the end of the chapter.

But first, Matthew 5, verse 43, where we read of a gospel demand.

[1 : 16] A gospel demand. This is our Lord speaking. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

And I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Romans 8, verse 1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[2 : 20] Verse 31. What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died.

More than that, who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God. Who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation or distress? Persecution or famine or nakedness? Danger or sword as it is written? For your sake we are being killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, verse 37. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[3 : 29] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God for his word. All right. In that this is the last session of the seminar, but I have the privilege to be with you tomorrow morning for your services.

I'm going to put you to work, and I think for some of us we need to work. Dinner was excellent, but it was heavily carved, and not everyone availed themselves to a cup of coffee or tea.

So may I have a volunteer, a young lady or an older lady, I don't care, to read John 15, 1, 4 to 5.

Just raise your hand and I'll bring you the card. Excellent. A young man to read, or an old man to read Galatians 2, 20. Thank you. Ladies, Ephesians 1, 3 to 5.

[4 : 46] I saw someone grab a sweatshirt. She wasn't raising her hand, though, so I didn't go that way. Gentlemen, Colossians 1. Awesome. Taylor. Oh, that didn't sound good.

Oh, that's all right. 2 Corinthians 5, 17 to 19. Where are we? Good. Audrey, thank you. 1 Peter 2, 5 to 6. Oh.

All the way in the back. I'm getting my steps in. And 1 John 2, 5 to 6. Great. John, can you just pass it over, John? Excellent. Okay, I'll call on you in a moment to read those scriptures.

When you read them, if you could stand up when you read them, and then also just cite the passage when you do read it.

Question I want to answer today, which I think connects to what we've been talking about in the first two sessions is, how do you know God loves you?

[5 : 47] If you're a parent and your child asks you that question, how do you answer that question? If you're a Christian and you're sharing the gospel with a coworker, a friend, a neighbor, a family member, how would you answer that question?

How do we answer that question when we experience difficulties and hardships and disappointments and suffering and various kinds of trials?

How do we know God loves us? Here's a different question, and it's a self-reflective question.

Would you say that you are confident in God's love for you? Not do you know something, but would you say that you're confident in what you know?

Meaning the person who knows you best, your spouse, your best friend, your roommate, the person who moves your trash. Would they say that person is confident in God's love for them?

[6 : 58] Even in life, that's a different question, isn't it? And then, what should we do when we're not?

What should we do when we're not? Not when we don't know something, but when our confidence in what we know begins to falter or flounder or flag.

I sense tonight that some of you here that, spiritually speaking, know that God loves you, but your confidence has wavered lately.

And there may be real reasons for that. Real reasons for that discouragement. Real reasons for that foggy windshield. When it comes to your perspective on Christ's love for you.

And if I'm being honest, there have been seasons in my life, both recent and distant, early, following my conversion and throughout my journey with Christ where I knew God loved me.

[8 : 10] I believe my conversion to the gospel was legitimate, but my confidence in his love was faltering. And if you're honest, when your confidence is faltering, you can't fake it.

You begin to look to other people or other things or other sources to bolster it, even if it's not ultimately Christ.

I think when we're talking about mission mindfulness and we consider that Jesus calls us to join him in our mission, it's not only that he wants to reach the lost, which he does.

He is the one who came to seek and save the lost. But there is something about mission that forces you, the Christian, and that forces us, the church, to really, really deepen our grasp and bolster our foundations in God's love for us.

Because it will be, and it is often, tested in mission. And so tonight's passages point to two realities that I want to draw attention to briefly.

[9 : 24] Where's Jen? Is Jen still in the... I never got from you what time this is supposed to be over. Did you say 10 o'clock? I have till 10. Then we're taking a long ice cream break, and then we're doing like a bonfire.

When do I have to be done? 8.40. I might go a little longer, but that's helpful.

I see the clock. Two ideas. The first one will be brief and amazing, and if not amazing, it'll be brief.

And the second one will be briefer. And that will be amazing, if you know me.

First, first point, humble confidence in God's love for me. Really simple. Humble confidence in God's love for me. The second one is we're called to imitate God's love for me to others.

Humble confidence, imitate Christ. Let's talk about the first one. Humble confidence in God's love for me.

[10 : 26] There's a really simple answer to that, and then there's a more profound reflection that allows that truth-filled reality to, by the work of the Spirit, deepen our grasp of it.

The death and resurrection of Christ gives Christians humble confidence in God's love. And that is not only evident in the passages that we read, that is Paul's confident hope as he articulated it in the Romans 8 passage just a moment ago.

If you'll turn back there with me. He says, in the midst of what is just not only beautiful writing, but he says that in all these things, what things, Paul?

The things that separate us from the love of God, right? The things that cause our confidence to waver in the love of God. He says in verse 37 that in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Through him who loved us. The death and resurrection of Christ gives us confidence in God's love for us through him who loved us.

[11:58] Meaning, tonight, Christ, if you're a Christian, has set and committed his heart to you.

He loves you and he loves me too. And he loves Trinity Church. Full stop.

And that gives Paul humble confidence in God's love. It's in the past tense.

You can consult Sean on the Greek syntax of that. But through him who loved us, that's past tense.

So this is a settled matter.

It is not open for debate. Your faithfulness does not change his commitment to love us. Isn't that good news? That is great news. That sounds like a gospel that remains full of grace.

[13:01] That God's love for me is rooted in the actions and work of Christ alone. Amen? And so when my faith is confident, that does not change his love for me.

It may change my experience of it in some way. But when my faith is floundering or faltering or I'm discouraged or even doubting or any host of things.

Paul says nothing can separate us from him through him who loves us.

That's extraordinary. That's extraordinary. And I don't think I grasp it sufficiently as a pastor, preacher to minister it.

But I can illustrate it. Which invites me to dive in deeper still. Linda helps explain anything that involves hardware, houses, and all the practical matters of life that we depend on every day.

[14:10] And I ask her to explain to me what's the difference between a master key and the keys that you get when you buy a home or duplicate keys for cars or some other possession.

And she said in very simple terms that the master key that you get, well, it goes the deepest into the lock. It goes all the way in.

Because it has to be able to open, right? Isn't this what you said? I was listening. I told him I don't listen in a while. Opens all the doors in the house, right? We have a master key at Crossway Church, but we can't find it.

So we got a bunch of copied keys. They're opening all the doors at Crossway Church. We're joking about this. But if you don't have a master key, you can only open some of the doors, which is better than nothing, right?

Gets you in some rooms. The death and resurrection of Christ, right, is the master key in the scriptures.

[15:18] It opens all the doors. But listen to this. But when Paul wants churches to grasp that and deepen their appreciation of it and have their worship through song fueled by it, have their prayers to God the Father changed by it, have their evangelism emboldened by it, he talks about union with Christ.

A hundred and sixty times explicitly in his letters. And most Christians I talk to don't know what that means. They just think it's two words.

In Christ. With Christ. Through Christ. Like it's a Bible prepositional thing, you know. Now, he is saying that the master key, the gospel, entitles us to a new covenant, new testament reality of union with him and his communion with us.

That if nothing else assures us of his love for us so that nothing, nothing will separate us from him.

There's so many more things we can say. But if we're going to live out of confidence, right, as Christians, as we're seeking to grow in our sanctification, in our Christ image bearing, in our godliness and holiness, we will have to open up all the doors that the gospel master key allows us in Paul's writings when it comes to this teaching on union with Christ.

[17:13] I mean, just not to overstate it, but the book of Ephesians, the first long sentence, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly places with every spirit.

He mentions union with Christ 11 times in that sentence. But in my life and in many of my peers' life, what gets the attention is, oh, no, the doctrine of sovereign election and salvation.

That's what's important in that passage. Or the doctrine of atonement through his blood. That's what's emphasized. Those are important, crucial.

But the emphasis of Ephesians 1 is in the new covenant, in this new reality. We have been joined to him, and he has joined himself to us.

And the hope of glory gives us humble confidence in God's love. There was a period in my life when it just felt like every ministry support was being pulled away and kicked out.

[18 : 23] And so here we are. We're a young church plant, I guess similar to Trinity. And it was just bad news followed by worse news of individuals and ministries that had supported us and been a vital part of life here in New England.

And they weren't just going away like they were gone. And I remember it was a beautiful, sunny day there in Cape May, New Jersey, in my family reunion.

And I'm walking, and I really wasn't talking to the Lord. I think I was angry at him. I'm pretty sure I was angry at him, which is, I know, sinful. And I was so preoccupied in my mind.

I'm supposed to be on vacation, enjoying the waves, and playing with my kids, and, you know, eating Cape May, whatever food. I wound up walking onto that part of beach that's like the Coast Guard part of the beach that, you know, they're sort of tracking you with missiles at that point and ready to take you down.

And I mean, so there's no one on that beach, and I'm just walking, and I'm in this. And I stopped, and I turned, and I realized I'm all alone, right, because I'm on a beach, and I'm not supposed to be.

[19 : 35] And I heard that still, small voice. Not audibly, but in my spirit, I knew it was the Lord.

It was just crystal clear. Bauer, you have never been alone. Now, I'm on vacation, and I hadn't had devotions at all that week. I'm a pastor.

I'm on payroll. I'm paid to have my devotions. And I know how to fake it. I wasn't listening to worship songs like this that week.

I had probably on my playlist from, I don't know, the 70s classic rock, you know, WMGK. In other words, I wasn't seeking the Lord. I was angry.

I was saying things to him like, I didn't sign up for this. This is not the arrangement we made when I said I would church plant for your glory.

[20 : 34] This is not how it's supposed to turn out. There's a whole list of things. But that didn't change his union with me.

Otherwise, how do you explain in that moment? When I'm not looking for him, he interrupts and says, you've never been alone. I broke.

I just started weeping. But I returned to my family on the beach, having had the master key open a new door.

That when you're not doing well in Jesus, when you're not growing the way you want to, when you feel like you've tried everything and there's no strength, no power, no growth, no hope, this is God's benediction.

In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. So how do we know God loves us? What do we do to have confidence in the love God has for us?

[21 : 45] How can we live out of that confidence in Christ's mission? Think about the death and resurrection of Christ and how it gives you humble confidence in God's love because he, he has joined himself to you.

Now I need my friends to read those scriptures. Who has Galatians 2.20? Just stand up and read it for us. I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. In a life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2.20 Thank you.

Galatians 1.28-29 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy, that he powerfully works within me.

Colossians 2.28-29 Ephesians 1.3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

[23 : 06] In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. Ephesians 1.3-5 Excellent.

John 15.1-4-5 I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser. Abide in me, and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15.1-4-5 2 Corinthians 5.17-19 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5.17-19 Thank you. 1 Peter 2. You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[24 : 28] For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. 1 Peter 2.5-6 Last one.

1 John 2. But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 2.5-6 Thank you, John. There are 180 passages in your New Testament that use language of in, with, and through Christ to give the believer and the believing church humble confidence in God's love.

So if I can appeal to you in your mission mindfulness, let's find them. Let's read them.

Let's internalize them. Let's be shaped by them. Second point. Out of that place of gospel reality flowing into our deepest parts, where God's tender heart and tender love for sinful and suffering people like me and you flows so deeply, we're called to imitate Jesus and God's love for others.

[25 : 53] which means in my relationships with the Jonathans of my life, in my relationships with the people who move my trash can, in the relationships with people that it is difficult to love, I have to learn how to deny myself and take up his cross and walk in the way.

of Christ. Jesus says that anyone who wants to follow him must take up their cross. You know that. You are well taught and you believe that if you were a believer before you came to Trinity, when you first came to Christ.

That means that the shape of our life is one of sacrificial love, service, and even suffering suffering for others.

It means, as we read in Matthew 6, that you and I do not have the option to hate our enemies any more.

We must love them. We must love our enemies who ridicule us and despise us and even act as if they are going to do things that would hurt or harm us.

[27 : 14] We are called to love as Jesus loves. And clearly, we will not be able to imitate Jesus in every respect.

But in this respect, we do not have a choice. Jesus answered the question for his disciples in Luke 9 when he said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

For me, that means the stamp on my Christian life every day. I remember Tim Shorey, who I think some of you know, just impressed this on me. Every day, as I celebrate the grace God gives me in Christ, as I rejoice in my union, as I come to Jesus as my salvation, as I receive forgiveness for the sins that I've committed, and rejoice in my justification, as I celebrate our reconciliation, as I rejoice that I'm his adopted child, the call remains, I am called to die to myself, which always involves sacrifice of something, submission to God in some way, self-denial, service, and suffering.

And therefore, I need that humble confidence in God's love to do that, to grow in that, to have a will for that, to have even the ability and power and inclination to do it.

Believe me, when God made it clear that I was going to have to return to bivocational ministry a few years ago, and no longer be a full-time shepherd, but hold two jobs, not one, in order to serve the flock that I'm called to pastor, my hours would have to increase, the number of people I'm serving would increase, which means the number of problems I'm going to face is going to increase.

[29 : 17] My first response was not, yes, thank you, Lord. That's what I signed up for. My first response was, no, Lord.

But he has been faithful through Christ's union with me to give me not only the energy to do it, but the ability to do it because he is disciplining me in the way of denying myself.

And so I realized this is what it means to follow him. This is what it means to be missionally mindful in our world as a Christian that has his identity stamped on me.

It's to have those words that he spoke in Mark 8 repeated again. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

So the issue is not do we know that. The issue is, by God's grace, are we resolved to doing that?

[30 : 34] The good news is that in Christ, as we falter and flounder and grow slowly in that call to imitate him, God still smiles upon us because our union with him remains firm.

But his call remains clear. And so as I close this, here's my closing question, as we consider mission mindfulness one last time.

Knowing that humble confidence in God's love through the death and resurrection of Christ is one of the great benefits given to us in the gospel.

How does the call to imitate him through denying ourselves and taking up our cross, how will you do that through him who loved us?

How will we remain faithful to him in taking up that cross through him who loved us?

[31 : 53] May God give us grace to not only hold closely to the heart of the gospel, but through our union with Christ, be shaped by the gospel in our imitation of Jesus.

Let's pray. Lord, the demands of the gospel are daunting.

And the grace given to us through the gospel are exhilarating. I pray, Lord, that you would bring together those two realities in a fresh way for me and for my friends as we conclude this portion of the retreat, that we would identify those circumstances or voices or difficulties in our lives that cause our confidence in your love for us to waver, to falter, to flounder.

And through your ministry and through the encouragement of friends, find by grace a growing humble confidence through our union with Christ, that the death and resurrection of Jesus has sealed your love.

But I pray too, Lord, as those who are called to Christ in mission, that you would help us to imitate him through taking up our cross, denying myself and sacrificing myself for others.

[33 : 33] Lord, not only in the church, certainly as those who desire to display the reality of the kingdom, but for those outside the church that are watching us, for we are salt, we are light, and we are called to good works in Christ.

So lead us in our reflection, Lord. Make us fruitful and faithful for your glory. In Jesus' name. And everybody said, Amen. If I can promote, just in closing, two quick resources, and I'll turn my mic off. We're promoting these at Crossway, and I highly recommend them. It's helped us grow in our understanding of some of the things I've been talking about. This is new. I had to go to Ireland to find it, but covered it while Linda and I were celebrating our anniversary in Ireland.

The Christian's True Identity by Jonathan Landry Cruz. It's outstanding, and I think you will find it very relevant and accessible.

And then Warren Betcher, who's a name I think some of you know, when he was with us two years ago, read this book, Union with Christ, and said it personally impacted him in ways that was profound.

[34 : 48] And so I commit this. This is by Rankin-Wilburn. I'll leave them out on the chairs if you want to look at it. But both of them will feed your appetite for more on this vital teaching.

Thanks. Thanks. Thanks.