

“Not Willing That Any Should Perish”

By Chris Ulrich

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Amen. You may be seated. Malcolm was getting a little bit into it, already, and I was like, “Come on, slow down, now.” I've got to say that, for as warm as it's been—how many would prefer minus ten, or how many would prefer what we have right now? I would prefer it be like this, I have to say. I, actually, am a little under the weather, today, so, bear with me, please. But, I would definitely take it like this over minus ten and feeling absolutely normal, but that's just me. And Parrish as well, so... But, it's good to see everybody this morning.

Our theme for the month has been the question, “Is love the greatest gift?” And, I have to admit that, when I first heard that, I looked at that, I thought about it, and I looked at that again, thought about it again, and thought, “I'm just going to say, 'Yes,' and then everybody's dismissed. ” But then I thought, “No, I don't want to cheat myself out of it; I don't want to cheat you out of that,” because I believe that God has something more for us today.

There's going to be three main points, today:

1. Who Do You Love and How Do You Do It?
2. Every Good and Perfect Gift (from James)
3. God Loves Us More than We Love Ourselves

I'm going to ask Malcolm if he could come back up, if he could lead us in prayer for the sermon, today.

Malcolm: God, we come humbly before Your throne, and we just ask You for a blessing on the sermon, Lord. Not only him, God, but that You would overshadow him with Your Spirit, that it would be a sweet savor that reaches to Your throne, that You would shower down a blessing upon him, so, we, who are hearing his voice, Lord, would be anointed, as well. Lord, that we would receive those things that we didn't even know we needed. We came here seeking something, and, maybe we don't know what it is, or, maybe we came with a certain request in our heart, but we won't even mouth it, we're too ashamed to stand before You and ask, because we consider it a small thing, but there is nothing too small for you, and there's nothing too great for You, God. Bless us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you, Malcolm.

1st Point – Who Do You Love and How Do You Do It?

I'm going to ask you to turn with me to the Book of Proverbs, chapter eight, verse thirty-six, and I want to intro that with a conversation that myself and Kirk Orelup had a few years back. I know that Kirk's not here today. He and Nubia are out, I believe, but the music sounded good. Now, don't tell him that the music sounded good, because he might misinterpret that, and say, “Oh, well, it sounded good without me.” But, I have to say that the music did sound good, and I appreciate that song, “Don't take my burden or my cross away.” I know I haven't heard that song in a while; I think it's been a while since you guys did that song. But, I really appreciate that. It ministered to me, personally, and we're going to talk about that today; we're going to talk about the gifts of God. That's been the theme of the month, about, “What is the greatest gift?” We know it's love; we know it's from God. Parrish talked a little bit about, in the first week, about what are some of the different gifts? And, yet, we know, we point back

to, the greatest gift is charity. The greatest gift is love, from God. But, I know this verse, here, in Proverbs eight might seem a little out of place; it might seem like, “Where in the world are you going with that verse? What would compel you to actually start a sermon on love with something like this?” So, I'm going to read it. And it says:

Proverbs 8:36 *But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.*

So, I know that that conversation that Kirk and I had a couple of years ago, we were a little bit troubled, and I think a lot of us are, that are Christians, we see the fascination that people have with death, with vampires, zombies, death, the occult, the nether world, or necromancers, or enchanters, or we could just go on and on, and think about all the ways—and Ouija boards—and just wonder, “Why is that?” I mean, they even have a series called “The Walking Dead,” and, I mean, I know it's on a certain channel, I don't watch it. If you do, okay, you do. This is not about a judgment that, if you're watching something like that, or if there's some degree of intriguing aspect... I guess that we're talking about something that, it is a great mystery. That Bible talks about it as the Great Beyond. It's something that we don't have a complete understanding, as far as, what's beyond that curtain. But, it does seem a little bit odd to me, and I think a lot of people would be in agreement, that there's such a fascination with death while we're alive. I remember I heard, my grandmother shared something that my grandfather told, and he died about thirty years ago. But she said that the statement that he had made was, “You're going to be dead a lot longer than you're living, so you might as well enjoy it.” And that said a lot to me, I mean, he passed away, he was seventy-one years old, he was a World War II veteran, and I had a great relationship with him. I was nineteen when he passed away. A lot of great memories. We're going to talk about memories, today, too.

But, I want to rewind the tape here and read from that same chapter, Proverbs chapter eight, and I want to read verse thirty-two through thirty-five. And it says, simply, this:

Proverbs 8:32-35 *Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.*

To borrow a statement that I hear a lot, “Now that's what I'm talking about!” Who do you know that says that a lot? Yeah, Ken Avellino. So, whoever you hear that does that says that, this is what we're talking about, having that favor of God, having that same favor of God and that life in Christ. If we love God, then we will know that God is the giver of life, and it is a gift. Let that sink in. Just understand that that is something, that, “...whoso findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.” That's what we're talking about today; that's our gift from God.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*

And, so, God is telling us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and mind and strength, and, yet, if we don't receive God's love in the first place, then we can't even love anything. We might think it's

love, we might call it love, but it's misdirected. It might have strings attached. It might be something where we're going to pick and choose who we're going to love. It might be something where, I know in society, I mean, it's thought of, a lot, as far as a romance, and, that's fine, I mean, the love between a husband and a wife, or between parents and their children, or between children and their parents, or family and friends. But we can't just pick and choose. And, I'm not talking about being a pushover, and thinking that we have to just extend ourselves to every single, solitary person, without understanding that we do have boundaries. We can't just give everything away, and think, "Oh, well, that's love. That's charity. That's what I'm supposed to do; I'm supposed to just give everything away." And that's not it at all. There's guidelines; there are boundaries. There's an understanding, there's an organization, there's a structure in this life. There's a lot of charities out there. We talked about that a little bit last month, about, what ways are we able to give. This isn't another repeat of tithes and offerings. It is talking about the gifts of God, though. It is talking about the love that God has for us. We all need to be able to get through this life, and a lot of times we're going to have to fight for what is right, and that doesn't sound like a lot of love. "Oh, how could you possibly think that that's of God?" It might not look like love to an outsider, but it is still the love of God. It is something that we have to have. We have to love God, and we need to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, but, we first need to acknowledge it. The reason I started out with this first point, about who do we love and how do we do it? Well, we can only do it through God. Otherwise, it's just flesh. Otherwise, it's just our own understanding of what we need to do, it's our own understanding of how we need to live. And the Bible talks about trust in the Lord with all our heart, lean not to our own understanding. And, I like what you shared, Ken, about, go to revisit the blessing from last week, about how we all have problems at different stages of our life, and they're different now than they were then, but, what we can do is trust in the same God. God's going to give us that guidance every step of the way. And that doesn't stop at some point, it doesn't whittle away, it doesn't deteriorate as time goes by. We have to look at it like, the Bible talks about, "But the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Proverbs 4:18) As we get closer, that walk with God should be getting stronger, we shouldn't be weakening. You look in the Old Testament, it talks about the House of Saul grew weaker and weaker, and the House of David grew stronger and stronger. (2 Samuel 3:1) And that's an example, to me, that we can grow stronger in God as time goes by. And we're going to fight battles. We're going to talk about that in a little bit, too. It's not just going to be a piece of cake.

2nd Point – Every Good and Perfect Gift

I'm going to read from the Book of James, chapter one, verse seventeen and eighteen. This is something that a lot of us are familiar with, but, if you're not, it's a passage that's worth remembering, because it puts it in perspective that, what are those gifts of God?

James 1:17-18 *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

When we really think about every good and perfect gift, it's something that God customizes for every person. In other words, the gift that you have, or I have, may not always look exactly like what somebody else gets, or what somebody else has. So, that's why it's important not to have envy. That's why it's important that we're not looking at what everybody else gets; we've got to look at what God has for us. And it's not always going to be the same thing as, like, a relative, or a friend, or somebody

sitting next to you. But, there's no limits to what we can regard as a gift from God. What is it you like to do? What's a hobby, or a pastime, or an activity that you gravitate towards?

Brent?

Brent: snowmobiling.

Ed?

Ed: Water-parks.

Beverly?

Beverly: reading

Anybody else?

Biking.

Mark?

Mark: Archery.

Pete?

Pete: Camping.

Sonia?

Sonia: Bird-watching.

Shopping.

Mike?

Mike: Watching sports.

Thank you. That's good. Those are a few of the things, and, we're talking about something that's wholesome. Everything that everybody named is something that's okay in the eyes of God. I'm not talking about overdoing it, and I'm not talking about being so weighted on it, and I'm not talking about doing it when it's time to pray, or time to study, or time to have fellowship, but we can incorporate fellowship into those things. We can incorporate our gathering together into those things. That's true. And, how are those things not a gift from God? And, I'm going to get into—I know what some people are thinking; I honestly think I know what people are thinking, and I'm not trying to read into somebody else's mind, or read somebody else's mind, but, I know, because this is what I was thinking as well. I get that we think that God is only going to give us a gift or a talent that is going to spiritually benefit ourselves or other people. So, I'm going to repeat that: We could think that those gifts are only going to be something that's going to spiritually benefit somebody else or ourselves. And, yet, I would have to say that, like some of the things that were mentioned, is there, like, a real spiritual

benefit to, like, just say, snowmobiling, or archery, or taking a drive, or biking or bird-watching? If we stood on the outside looking in, we'd say, "Absolutely not. Everybody else does that, too. And it wasn't a trick to try to get people to say, "Oh, this is what I like to do in my past-time," because I like to do a lot of the same type of things, too. But those are gifts of God. If we think just evangelizing or teaching or prophesying or the ability to perform miracles, those are the only gifts of God; those absolutely are gifts of God, but there has to be a balance between them. There has to be, I guess, for lack of a better term, a social life, a spiritual life, and, yes, there is an interaction between the two. And it's not like we're trying to be as worldly as possible. That's not what I'm talking about, either. Because, even in the Book of John, it talks about, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30) And these don't mean that God is going to give us less and less of something; He might, that is the truth. There might be some things that we do less of as time goes by. But, I mean, if a couple of us are going off, and we're getting Popeye's Chicken as we're going to visit Jesse Gulley, I'm enjoying it. Brent's enjoying it. Jesse's enjoying it. Alex is enjoying it. That's right; sign me up. I mean, things like that, and, yet, it's a dual purpose visit; encouragement, fellowship time. So, that's more of what I'm talking about. And I'm here to say that it's a combination of a lot of those gifts and talents. And there's things that edify others, and there's things that edify us, and God's given us a time for all of those things.

I want to read from Ecclesiastes. three, verses one through eight. It's another verse that a lot of us are probably familiar with. It talks about the times. It talks about the different times and seasons that we have. But, how many likes being on the receiving end of edification. How many likes being on the giving end of edification? Amen. It's a balance. It's not, "I'm just going to hear or receive..." I like a statement that Pastor Thomas made last week, "If we're just sitting there, waiting, and we're just worried about how everybody else treats us, 'Oh, you looked at me the wrong way!' 'Oh, you did me wrong!' Well, it's a two-way street." It's like, well, how was I looking back? It's not the kind of thing where it's like we're always ready for a fight because every time we have some perceived slight or 'dis,' as the expression goes. Because those things, the Bible says offenses are going to come. But, we have to be able to get over those things. God's given us that power to be able to overcome hurt feelings, or misfortunes, or frustrations, or whatever way else you want to describe it.

Ecclesiastes 3:4-8 *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

I'm going to continue in a moment, but, I think we all can relate to these experiences that we go through: A time to heal, a time to break down, a time to pluck up that which is planted, a time to plant, a time to mourn.

Ecclesiastes 3:5-8 *A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*

I know one of my favorite gifts is the ability to remember. And I hope everybody can relate to that. And I know that, maybe some of your memories are painful. Maybe you've got some precious memories. I remember, we had a group, several years ago, the Masonic Quintets, they did a song, it was called, "Precious Memories." And I don't remember all the words, but I remember that that's part of life. Part of life is in God. I'm going to share another song. A lot of you probably remember there was a Barbra Streisand song that she said, "Memories may be beautiful, and, yet, what's too painful to

remember, we simply choose to forget.” It was a beautiful song. I'm just going to say it. I mean, it was a long time ago, a lot of you may not even remember it whatsoever at all, or don't even know who she is. But, I would have to say that sometimes they're painful; sometimes they're memorable. Sometimes they're enjoyable; sometimes we can think back at those times, but I know the Bible talks about, in John 14:26, it says the Holy Ghost shall bring all things into remembrance. And, so, it's not something that's out of order, or something that isn't from God. It's something that's a gift of God; no doubt about it, it's a gift of God.

So, what about those gifts that might not really seem like they're gifts of God? And I'm going to talk about a few examples, here. I'm going to talk about some things that we all see. How many here likes to drive a car? Even if you don't have a car. I'm not talking about just driving to work, either. A lot of us do like to take what is affectionately known as a road trip. And, a lot of us, here, we've been on road trips together, and I've enjoyed those. To me, the qualification of a road-trip is at least 500 miles total, driving, but that's just me! Maybe you feel like, “Well, I drive fifty miles, that's a road trip.” This isn't about getting into an argument about road trips, or what qualifies or not. So, we like to drive. How many's ever seen an oil-refinery? There's a few; I've seen them around the country, but, growing up, we used to visit family down in Delaware, and, as you come into Wilmington, Delaware, across the George Washington Bridge, a lot of you from the East Coast are probably familiar with what I'm talking about. You start going south on the road that goes across the state, and, as you're coming across the bridge, you can see this sprawling oil refinery in this city called Delaware City, Delaware. So, it was always fascinating to see, as a kid, especially at night, I mean, there's all these lights and everything, it was lit up, really bright. As I got a little bit older, and understood, “What's that, dad?” “Aw, that's an oil refinery.” But, the truth is, when you look at something like that, it's not a very attractive sight, I mean, it's not looking at the Grand Canyon. It's not looking at, like, the Tetons, out in Wyoming. It's not like looking at some of the volcanic activity in Hawaii. It's man-made, but, it's needed. And, if I think that driving's a gift of God—and I'm not getting into the environmental aspects of it, I'm just talking about, I like driving, most of us like to drive. Again, that wasn't a trick question, but, you look at the sprawl of an oil refinery, and you look at it like it's something that's needed to turn the oil in to gasoline. Here's another example: How many's ever seen a boiler room? It's something where there's pumps, and all that kind of equipment, and some of us work on them, and some of us really don't know much about it. It's not a very pretty sight either, but, it's something where, it's just equipment, but, without it we're not going to have any heat. You look at high-tension wires? If you're in an apartment, it's like, “That's ungodly, or grotesque, or displeasing to see it,” but, without it, we're not going to have any power whatsoever. Unless you have a generator,; that's a different story, but..

What it really comes down to is, those are physical things, and I get that those are just manifestations of something, but I want to talk about spiritual gifts now, and some things that might not get a lot of recognition, but are real. What about the gift of being hospitable? What about being able to make some sacrifices that maybe nobody else knows about, and don't really need to know about, but God knows about. What about the ability to get over heartache or bitterness that isn't easy. We're all going to feel some heartache and some bitterness at some point in life. Or anger, or hatred, or sadness, or tragedy. Hebrews chapter three talks about not having that root of bitterness whereby many be defiled. And it's something that's not easy to get over, because, there's a lot of things that come along, and a lot of things that we might not be able to explain to anybody else, or feel, maybe, a little bit embarrassed to do that. Because then it's a matter of looking at it like, but, you know what? God knows. God knows what we have to deal with. God gives us that power to get over those things. What about that ability to be able to give in a charitable way that nobody else knows about? Again, Christ said, “Do not your alms before men to be seen of them.” It's a private thing. But, it's something that God said that He'd reward us openly. And that's a promise from God.

3rd Point – God Loves Us More than We Love Ourselves

I'm going to share something kind of personal; this was something that, this was, maybe, twenty years ago, and I'm not saying he never said it prior to that. I know he's said it, at times, since then. But, our General Pastor, Pastor Paine, said that God loves us more than we love ourselves. And, it was the kind of thing where, when I heard it, it really stood out to me, because I felt like, "That's a pretty bold statement, because I'm talking more about the soul. I'm not talking about ego; I'm not talking about arrogance; I'm not talking about how we look in the mirror and we love ourselves. That's a different thing. That's a different thing altogether. But, I know that, when he shared that, I thought, "I don't know if that's true," because we're talking about how badly do you want to see your soul saved? How badly do you want to hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."? Because, it's not about popularity contests; it's about, "How much do I really value my soul, and do I really think that God values my soul more than I value my soul? Because, then it's matter of, "I know myself." We all know ourselves. And, so it wasn't something where I—I didn't disagree with him, like a contrary thing, but, it was one of those things where it was like I believed right away, or, as they say, "took, hook, line and sinker." But, I feel like it was one of those things where, if I really felt like if it were true, then I needed God to prove it to me. And, again, this wasn't a doctrinal issue. This wasn't something where, "Oh, you don't believe in the oneness of God? You don't believe in a standard of holiness?" This was not a doctrinal issue, and there are times when we do face those subject matter things, that it's not always a doctrinal matter. It's not always a doctrinal issue. I'll give you an example: Like, when Parrish and Andy were asked to lead this fellowship, that has nothing to do with doctrine. And I'm looking at these two guys—but it has to do with a pattern of good works. And I know that, when I heard that—and this isn't just a matter of spouting off or just, like trying to force an opinion on somebody, but I thought that, "It makes sense to me." It wasn't even a battle. So, this, here, it was a little bit more of a battle, but, again, it wasn't the kind of thing where I felt like, "No! Pastor, you're doing evil!" It wasn't that kind of thing at all. But, again, it was a matter of, God has more than one way of being able to prove His love.

2 Peter 3:9-14 *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

So, if our goal, here, was to analyze this passage I'm sure our main focus would be, "How does the world end? Does it end in a nuclear war, or does end with fire from above like Sodom and Gomorrah, or who's going to be left behind. But I don't think anybody would say that it has anything to do with God loving us more than us loving ourselves. After all, what kind of loving God would destroy the Earth like this? What kind of loving God would rain fire down on the Earth, and on His people, that He says He loves? But if we look a little closer, and look at the part that states, "Not willing that any should perish," That's the title of the sermon today. "Not Willing that Any Should perish." There are rules, there are boundaries, there are laws from God, there are decrees from God that God says, "This is what I'm asking you. I love you more than you love yourself. I know the very hairs upon your head." I

don't, and I don't think, realistically, that anybody in this room could make a case for that, either. But, I want to share this, too, that maybe you don't feel like God loves you more than you love yourself, yet. It may take time. It's not a matter of just trying to force it down anybody's throat, either, and just say, "No, no! You have to believe this!" It's not a doctrinal issue. It's a statement that was made that I felt like was made by a man of God, that I didn't have strong disagreement within my heart, but that I just felt, "I don't know that that's true." Well, I believe that; it took a little time. And, maybe it just took a little bit of a jump start for me to even ask that question, "Do I believe that?" Because, that's what we're talking about is the love of God. It's not something that it's always easy to see. God's invisible; the Bible even says that. But we already talked about all the manifestations that, the things that we like to do, the hobbies that we have, the gifts of God that edify us, the gifts of God that edify others. Because, it's not just a one-way street. It's a matter of looking at it like God's looking for us to be edified, but He's also looking for us to do something, as well, not just be on the receiving end.

How and why is the love of God the greatest gift of all? It's simple, God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and the knowledge of the Truth.

I thank you all for your time. It's good to see everybody. Have a blessed day.