

Love the Lost

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening everyone, as you obviously recognise that I am not live with you tonight because I didn't realise, I'm speaking at the Board of Ministry report at the General Assembly and I didn't realise until yesterday that the report was from 6.30 in the evening. I had understood that it was on Wednesday afternoon so I had mostly prepared my talk this evening so I thought the best thing to do would just be to record it so that you can listen to it and not try and get someone else at the last minute to prepare something and that you can then head into prayer and we can follow on in the series that we're doing on Gospel conversations and hunters very happily agreed to lead the meeting tonight and Hunter I'm very grateful to you for doing that. So really I just want to spend a little time as we carry on in our discussions on Gospel conversations to look at loving the lost and the importance of that. The chapter that I'm looking at and some scripture obviously as well is from Matt Smithers before you share your faith and it's the chapter on loving the lost which is chapter three and I would encourage you to read that because I'm not going to be referring to a great deal tonight but it'll be helpful to read it before the city group and because some of the questions might be related to the chapter instead or some of the points that are raised in the chapter. So loving the lost it seems a very obvious thing to say and yet very important but I do think that when it comes to sharing our faith we're always fighting well I certainly am and I'm sure most of us are to a greater or less degree we're fighting our natural instincts and we have several natural instincts that maybe resist or work against us sharing the Gospel and maybe the first is safety first and we want to stay safe within the Christian family and that's right isn't it? Corey preached on that last Sunday morning about the importance and the significance the centrality of Christian family that's absolutely central and it's vital for us to be linked in and secure and committed to our church family but sometimes we can use that as a reason for being in a Christian bubble and never coming out of that and maybe we also hear the message of society with regard to privatisation of everything including our faith and so we compartmentalise our lives and we keep our faith to ourselves and we stay within the Christian community and this Christian family and we just survive in the outside world without seeing the need to take risks of faith so safety first is a natural instinct with us so it's actually I think for us finding fault comes very naturally to us in our sinful nature really we look at the world and rather than using discernment about the world we simply judge the world and we take the place of God we love being in the judgment seat of God and I heard an interesting thing recently we said that when it comes to and this is maybe a different thing but it comes to our own faults we act like a defence lawyer when it comes to the

faults of others we act like a judge and that's very true is that we see the sin in the world around us and the behaviour of people in the immorality maybe and the unbelief and the atheism or whatever it might be we condemn it or we're shocked or we're coiled and we declare we've got nothing in common and what is light to do with darkness and so we isolate further and yeah sometimes if we have the wrong attitude in that we feed that sense of taking God's place being judges and it fosters pride within us because we are to discern we are to have a hatred of sin but we're not to be in the seat of judgment so finding fault is another natural reaction and a third one is fear within us I'm not going to talk much about fear because that's subject for another week but very often when we separate ourselves from the world we don't take time to understand people we don't take time to think about them as estranged children from their father and rather we see them to be avoided and we become afraid of people because we don't really know them and we also fear their response and their opposition and we become just paralysed by fear because we don't get to know and love people but also sometimes fear is caused by our longing for popularity and it's popularity is so important to us and we have no problem and no trouble making friends in the world, the other issue we have no problem making friends with people who are not

Christians and be very close to them and acting in many ways like them but we fear their response if we share the gospel with them or share the message of Christ or challenge them in their life so we remain silent and fear again paralyses us so these are some of the natural responses of our heart that cause us to struggle to share our faith but I think it's really important for to recognize that every part of our Christian walk encompasses at least two foundational truths there are two really important truths to think about when we think about the gospel and sharing our faith and loving people first is that we're new creations we're new creations in your in the city groups so maybe look at 2 Corinthians 5 11 to 21 which speaks about us being new creations in Christ and what that means and that speaks about identity doesn't it?

it reminds us that we are loved that we have belonging that we're right with God and we're right with God because of Jesus' sacrificial love he took my sins from himself and across and we're part of a community of believers that that also recognize that and we help and encourage each other to grow in that grace and to share together in that identity to encourage one another and to encourage one another to share that great identity that we have in Christ that takes away fear and reminds us the love that secures our identity and the second foundation not just that we're new creations but that we're being transformed by that love itself Romans 12 two reminds of that we're not to be conformed to the world but be transformed because of the love of

Jesus Christ in this so that we're not therefore to capitulate to our natural desires our natural fears and our natural desires to find fall or to be safe and cocooned but we're to recognize that God's transforming our love and our heart for the lost and also for himself of course and we know that that's a battle for us and our whole Christian lives is to recognize that we're to be transformed in our heart and our life and our attitudes and our responsibilities are being turned upside down by Jesus very often I think we can we feel safe and relaxed without recognizing the huge battle that is at work in our own hearts because of what Jesus has done so these two foundational truths are very important first we are loved we're a new creation in Christ and we're really loved by him and that love is a transforming love that changes us and changes our attitudes the way we think not only as we love him and love one another but also as we love our enemies or love the lost as well however we term whatever term we use so sharing if we're going to be sharing our faith how is it that we love the lost well how is it that we can love the lost well well I think there's a few things

[9 : 22] I just want to say quickly about Jesus and using Jesus as an example for us here and the first is Jesus' own reputation it reminds us of how to love the lost well in Luke's Gospel chapter 7 and verse 34 we have the Pharisees speaking about Jesus the Son of Man or Jesus saying in response to the Pharisees the Son of Man came eating and drinking and you say he is a glutton and a drunkard a friend of tax collectors and sinners that's in response to his behavior as opposed to John the Baptist's behavior so Jesus' reputation among the religious leaders of his community was that he was a friend of sinners tax collectors and sinners in other words he was known for associating with those who are lost and who are regarded as unclean or outcasts and or undesirables he was wrongly accused and this is very important he's wrongly accused obviously of being a drunkard and a glutton yet he clearly committed himself to people who weren't Christians who weren't believers who didn't have faith he attended situations of feasting and drinking and he was willing to risk being misunderstood and it's very important to remember that it was a misunderstanding he wasn't a drunk and he wasn't a glutton and I think sometimes we can use that text as an excuse to be in the world and of the world as well but he clearly intentionally chose to make friends with the lost with those who weren't believers and to accept the risk of that and I think 1st

Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 7 I may also reflect Paul following his master's example where he says in verse 7 and 8 so we cared for you because we loved you very much we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well so many of these Christians in Thessalonica became Christians because Paul and the apostles shared their lives and became friends with them and maybe at risk being misunderstood so Jesus' reputation helps us to understand a little more about how to love the lost well but also Jesus' motivation and I'm going to read a longer passage here if you'll bear with me it's mark chapter 10 verse 17 I'm reading from the NIV here my own Bible as Jesus started on his way a man ran to him and fell on his knees before him good teacher he asked what must I do to inherit eternal life why do you call me good Jesus answered no one is good except God alone you know the commandments you shall not murder you shall not commit adultery shall not steal you shall not give false witness you shall not defraud honor your father and mother teacher he declared all these I have kept since I was a boy Jesus looked at him and loved him one thing he said you lack go sell everything you have and give to the poor you will have treasure in heaven then come and follow me at this man's face fell he went away sad because he had great wealth

Jesus looked ground and said to his disciples how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God disciples were amazed as words but Jesus said again children how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God it's easier for the camel to go through the eye of a needle than someone who's rich to enter the kingdom of God the disciples were even more amazed and said to each other who then can be saved Jesus looked at them and said with man this is impossible but not with God all things are possible to God and Peter spoke up we've left everything to follow you truly I tell you Jesus replied no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age homes brothers sisters mothers children in the fields along with persecutions and the age to come eternal life but many who are first will be last and the last first and we see there Jesus teaching but also Jesus motivation this rich man comes to him and he just got these lovely words in verse 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him so he just loved this guy and it's such a beautiful verse that he loved the lost and he was fulfilling his own teaching from Matthew 5 in the sermon on the mount about loving an enemy good to look at that passage again and do good pray for those who persecute you and so we see his motivation leads him to a conversation with this rich man and the answer the asking of a provocative question and he had time to converse with him he gave him of his precious time but in doing so he loved him but he he didn't hold back the truth he exposed the reality of this man's heart and maybe in ways that we can't in the same way although we seek

God's wisdom so to do in our lives and as we pray and as we depend on the Father amazing things can happen but Jesus didn't hold back in the truth despite the apparent obedience of the life of this man and yet he exposed the idol in his heart and I think one of the interesting things here is there's no evidence whatsoever that this was a successful encounter in the sense of this man becoming this rich man becoming a believer we don't know he went but we do know he went away sad so this isn't about successful evangelism I'm speaking at this point it's just about the example of Jesus who loved this man and shared the gospel shared the truth with him and because his motivation was so significant and then from that we get Jesus teaching to towards the end of that section where he makes clear that the journey of faith or coming to faith is tough it's a battle it's a battle particularly for those who are rich maybe even especially physically rich or materially rich but also those who feel rich in themselves and who don't feel poverty stricken it's just hard it's it's hard for them to come to faith and it's it's hard to see results and even Jesus the Son of God here his words don't bring this man to faith as far as we're aware in fact it's not it's just hard it's actually impossible you know the disciples see what really the earth can be saved then Jesus said look this is impossible with us but it's not impossible with God and that's the thing you know when we love people and what we see about Jesus he reminds us that he he loves people enough just to tell them the truth and we need to do that as well even though it's tough and but there must be this recognition that our love for them is such that we will tell them the truth and overcome the fears that we might have and the natural instincts that we have our inclinations and recognize that our task is impossible and it will we will have butterflies in our stomach and we will be opposed even but recognize that what we think is impossible and and is impossible for us in many ways to do both naturally and because of the condition of people's hearts it's not impossible for God you know but with God all things are possible Jesus says and so it's the reminder to us really that we're we're coming to God about this we're coming to God asking for the impossibility of loving the way he loves loving our enemies loving those who are lost taking the risks of faith and making unbelieving friends maybe especially among people that are social outcasts maybe are the unexpected or those who are not our natural friends but but but whatever we do to do it in such a way that we're we're willing to risk being misunderstood but also avoid and compromise you know that's that's why we need the impossible grace and strength of God to do this you know that we don't become friends with the world in order to be just like the world and to become drunkards and glutton's you know and others engaging in sinful pleasure and to in the name of evangelism which is easy to do it's easy to get into that rut and but to see how great are the riches we've received amazing gifts we've been given by God amazing life we have and to see that that life is precious and is transforming our hearts changing

our softening our hearts and working with the not working against the natural and sinful inclinations of our heart not to share the gospel or to judge and be separate from others or maybe even to share the gospel in a harsh and and critical or or a loveless way a proud way whatever it might be we need we need the grace and the the strength and the help of the Holy Spirit and God and to take time the impossibility of that all and to love the way he loves and when we do so we know that there will be opposition he says that in verse 30 along with persecutions it's part of what we've we've received when we deceive Christ but it's this it's this transformation where he says that those who are first will be last and the last will be first it's upside down everything is changing the rich man the person we speak to the friend that we have may well go away sad but that might not be the end of the story and the story is not being written by us and we are simply to plow this turf furrow but to do it in love and to share our faith and it may be that some people will persecute us or give us a hard time but we know that others will believe because it's God who saves and God is sovereign God is us in His kingdom and He uses us to do that it's His sovereign work and that gives us great comfort we are simply called to be transformed to depend on Him to love like Him to love Him love others who are our brothers and sisters and love the lost and love our spiritual enemies as it were pass on the good news and that's a remarkable privilege and it's something we need His help to do so I think often our lack of sharing our faith is because we don't love like Jesus and that's because we've forgotten it's impossible to love like Jesus without being dependent on God and without seeing the need for our own hearts to be transformed to have the mercy and the loving kindness and the concern for people that Jesus Himself had so it's just really a taster there are many things that you will discuss differently maybe at the city group but I hope that that has at least read your appetite to think a little bit more about the nature of what God's wanting to do in us before and during and as we seek to love the lost be willing to be misunderstood but also be willing to be courageous and in love share the good news of Jesus as He is transforming us so He will change redeem and make new creation of others thanks