

The Shape of the End (25:31-46)

If you've got a bible, **turn with me** to **Matthew 25**. If you're new here on Sundays, our church has been walking through the entire gospel of Matthew in the bible, which is one of four early biographies about the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus is sort of a big deal to us around here, so we figure there are few better things to do than just spend the better part of three or four years getting to know him really, really well. And that's precisely what we're doing by studying this book together. We've been at it since August 2020.

But **specifically, over the past three or four weeks**, we've been looking at a section of Matthew where Jesus talks a lot about what *he* calls "the end." "The end" is his language for the day at some point in the future where he returns to earth a second time and makes all things new. **For the past four weeks, we've looked at what Jesus says about *that day*.**

And we've looked at it **from all different angles**. We've clarified *some* portions of Matthew 24 that—contrary to what some people think—probably *aren't* about the day Jesus returns. We've talked about **what the end *won't* look like**—that it probably *won't* look like Jesus sucking us all up into heaven through a secret rapture (our apologies to Kirk Cameron about that). We've *also* talked about how **none of us should busy ourselves** with trying to *predict when* Jesus will return, because according to Jesus, even *he himself* doesn't know. And then the past *two* weeks, we've talked in detail about how to be *ready* for the end.

But **one thing that we *haven't* discussed**, at least in *detail*, is what exactly the end **will be like**. What is the *shape* of that day? What exactly will *happen on* that day, when Jesus makes all things new? **That, largely, is what we're going to get into this morning**. So...are you guys ready for *one more teaching* about the end of the world? I'm not exactly sure what I wanted out of that question, but that'll do. ~~One of you is very excited, the rest of you are already here and didn't know and now feel awkward leaving.~~

Ready or not, **here we go**. Take a look with me in chapter 25, beginning in v. 31. Jesus speaking, says this:

31 "When the Son of Man (that is, Jesus himself) **comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne**—which is a way of signifying Jesus' authority and power as king. "Then," Jesus says, **32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a**

shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

So Jesus tells us that **at the conclusion of history**—whenever that occurs—all of the “nations” will be brought before him. Now, that phrase “nations” in v. 32 could be more *literally* translated “people”—all the *people* on earth will be gathered before him. And **at that point, Jesus will make a determination about the ultimate destiny of every person who ever lived.**

And **to describe how that will work exactly**, he uses a metaphor of a *shepherd* separating *sheep* from *goats*. This was a metaphor lifted directly out of the *Old Testament* book of Ezekiel,¹ but it was also just a commonly understood *responsibility* of shepherds at the time. **The metaphor likely had at least two components** to it. On the *one hand*, to the average person, from a *distance*, *sheep* and *goats* would look at least somewhat *similar*, especially when mingling together out in the fields. But on the *other hand*, up close, any shepherd worth his salt would obviously be able to distinguish *between* them.

So here’s what I think Jesus is saying: **similarly, when you and I look** at people from a *distance*, we often aren’t very good judges of who they are or what they’re like. We’re often not good at determining their *character*, much less if they truly know Jesus or where they will spend eternity. *But*, Jesus says, **he does know. The Good Shepherd can be trusted to make that determination.** *He* sees with *complete* clarity which people know and love and follow him, *and* which ones *don’t*. That’s what a *shepherd* does, and that’s what Jesus ultimately says that *he* will do when the end comes.

Now *next*, he’s going to tell us more about exactly **how he will make that determination.** Look with me at v. 34:

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right (which, according to v. 33, is the *sheep*), **‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For** (here’s the reason:) **I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’**

So, the determining factor—the way Jesus distinguishes between the so-called “sheep” and the “goats”—**evidently, is this: the sheep are the ones who, in one way or another,**

¹ Specifically, chapter 34.

welcomed Jesus. Accepted Jesus. If people did *that*, Jesus says, they get to spend eternity with him and the Father in what he calls the “kingdom.” Now, **that probably jibes**, more or less, with what many of *us* have heard *before* about eternity. Especially if we grew up in the *Church*. To a lot of us, it probably sounded something like this: “if you *accept* Jesus, you go to *heaven*. If you *don’t* accept Jesus, you go to the other place.” That sound familiar to anybody? I figured as much. So far, so good.

But at the same time, Jesus seems to be saying a little *more* than that here. Because it doesn’t seem like he’s just talking about raising your hand in a church service or telling people you “accepted” Jesus in a *spiritual, internal* sense. *Here*, it seems like Jesus means something a little more *tangible*. A little more *active*. *He* speaks of us *feeding* him. *Giving* him something to *drink*. *Clothing* him. *Tending* to him when he was sick. *Visiting* him in prison. That, at least to *me*, seems a little more *concrete* than just “asking Jesus into your *heart*.” Do you see that? **So the question then** is what does Jesus *mean* exactly, by us doing all of these things for him? What does it mean to feed, clothe, visit, provide for, etc. *Jesus*?

And that, really, is the **question that gets asked** *next* in the *passage* itself. Look with me at v. 37:

37 “Then the righteous (who, in the story, are the same group of people as the “sheep”) **will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’**

So these people in the story have **roughly the same question we do**: *Jesus, what do you mean, that we did these things for you? How specifically have we fed you, clothed you, welcomed you, provided for you? / Jesus’ answer—v. 40:*

40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

So turns out, Jesus wasn’t talking about the people in the story **literally feeding and clothing and caring for him**. He was saying that by them doing that for this **other group of people, they were in essence doing it for Jesus**. Which *means* that to understand the type of thing Jesus is *commending* here, we really need to nail down who exactly this group of people *is*. Once we know *that*, we can know who the people are that *Jesus* is identifying himself *with*, and know who it is that *we* are called to care for as followers of Jesus. Everybody with me so far? Okay.

Now, **some people have suggested** that what Jesus is talking about here is just a general sense of generosity and benevolence and justice towards people in the world who are in need of those things. *So if anyone in the world is hungry, you should feed them. If anyone is thirsty, you give them something to drink. If anyone is in need of clothing, you clothe them. And so on.* That's what some people think Jesus is referring to here. And just for clarity, there are many places *elsewhere* in the bible that do encourage us to do that.²

But Jesus' language here in Matthew 25 is a bit more *specific* than that. He doesn't just say "if you fed *any person who was hungry*, you fed me." He says "if you fed the least of these *brothers and sisters of mine*, you fed me." And **everywhere else that Jesus uses "brother and sister" language, it refers specifically to followers of Jesus.** People who *belong* to the kingdom of God. For example, take a look at this from **Matthew 12, v. 50:**

...whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister...

So it would seem that Jesus is talking *here* about the way we, as followers of Jesus, treat *other* followers of Jesus. **According to Jesus, the determination of who spends eternity with him, and who will spend eternity separated from him, will depend—at least partly—on how we treat other followers of Jesus.** He literally teaches that the people who "inherit" the place "prepared" for them do so because they *tangibly provided for other followers of Jesus who were in need of those things.*

Now, **let's take just a second and unpack** that. Because at least on its own, some people, and some church traditions, would be very uncomfortable with what I just said. To *them*, that might sound like Jesus is saying that we are accepted by God on the basis of our "works" (which is Christian shorthand for "things that we do.") And if that's what Jesus is saying, that would place him at odds with much of *Paul's* writing in the New Testament, about how we *aren't* justified by our works.³ Now, *I don't think that's what Jesus is saying at all; I personally am of the belief that Jesus has great theology.* But he *is* saying that our "works" (specifically here, our love for each other) is *evidence* of a relationship with Jesus. **Jesus *isn't* saying that people are saved by things that they do. But he is absolutely saying that the things that they do reveal whether or not they truly are saved.** Does that make sense?

² Romans 12:20 and Galatians 6:10, to name just a couple examples.

³ For one example, see Ephesians chapter 2.

And **this idea specifically**—that our *love and care for other followers* of Jesus is evidence of our faith—comes up *several* other times in the bible. The book of *1 John* specifically brings up this idea a lot. Take a look with me at just **a couple examples**, up on the screen. This first one is from **1 John 4:7-8**:

*Dear friends, let us love **one another**, for love comes from God. Everyone who **loves**—which, in context, means “loves one another”—has been **born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.***

That’s **fairly plain language**: someone who actively *loves* other followers of Jesus, *knows* God. And someone who *doesn’t* actively love other followers of Jesus, *doesn’t* know God. Look with me at *another* example in 1 John 3:

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we **ought** to lay down our lives for **our brothers and sisters**. If **anyone** has **material possessions** and sees a **brother or sister in need** but has **no pity** on them, how can the love of God be **in** that person? Answer: it *can’t*. *Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*⁴*

So **this one sounds a lot like Jesus’** logic in Matthew 25. ~~It’s...almost like the Scriptures are unified in what they teach or something.~~ *John* just said “if you love and care for God’s people, that’s *evidence* of you having a relationship with *God*.” So *if* you see a brother or a sister in some type of need—food, water, clothing, assistance—and you *do not* lend a hand? Well then the only logical conclusion is that you do not actually know God.

So **do you see how closely these two ideas are connected** in the Scriptures? **A love for Jesus necessitates a love for other followers of Jesus. And a genuine love for other followers of Jesus is evidence of a love for Jesus.** *This is why I get so baffled when people say things like, “oh I love Jesus; I just don’t love the Church.” Because that, with all due respect to the person saying it, is theologically impossible.* You can love Jesus and be *frustrated* by the Church. You can love Jesus and have *issues* with the Church. You can even love Jesus and not be a fan of a lot of the church’s activities and actions. **But you can not love Jesus and not love, serve and sacrifice for other people that love Jesus.** Not help them, care for them, provide for them when they’re in need. You can’t love Jesus without living in active relationship with other followers of Jesus. Jesus just told us that is an *impossibility*: **if you love God, you necessarily will love God’s people.**

⁴ 1 John 3:16-18

And, Jesus is going to tell us next, “there are **consequences** of living a life *absent* of the love of God.” Pick it back up with me in **Matthew 25, v. 41**. This is where it gets heavy:

41 “Then he will say to those on his **left** (so now Jesus pivots and talks to the other group of people), ‘**Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.** **42** For I was **hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,** **43** I was a **stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.**’ And then, v. **44** “**They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’** **45** “He will reply, ‘**Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.**’ **46** “Then **they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.**”

Okay. So **Jesus just repeated everything he said in the first half of the passage, but now he puts it in reverse.** The first group cared for *Jesus* by caring for his *people*. Their welcome and provision for God’s people was *evidence* of their welcome and provision for *Jesus* himself. **And in this part of the passage, we find out that the inverse is just as true.** The second group of people’s *unwillingness* to welcome and provide for God’s people is *evidence* of their *rejection* of *Jesus* himself.

And the consequence of rejecting Jesus is eternal separation from him. It’s what Jesus describes with imagery like “eternal fire” and “eternal punishment.” Which is the imagery Jesus uses elsewhere for what you and I call *hell*: the state of perpetual *separation* from God. **Which means that in the past three teachings I’ve given here at City Church, I’ve talked about abusive church leaders, the end times, and hell. I’ve got to get better at putting together our teaching schedule. I really should be giving other people the difficult teachings.**

Plus, from what I can recall, Marcus all but promised you last week that this week, I was going to answer all your questions about hell. Thanks for that Marcus. But, let’s talk. Because this idea of *hell*, or “eternal punishment,” is admittedly one of the most *difficult* ideas for us as modern people to get on board with. To many, *hell* feels incompatible with our understanding of who God is and what he’s supposed to be like. We hear passages like *this* one and, whether we want to admit it or not, something in our spirit just goes, “*really? Eternal punishment? Fire?*”

So because of that reaction, **here’s what I’d like to do.** Here for a bit, I want to try to address some of the more common *push-backs* we tend to have to the idea of *hell*. We’ll

take a brief detour to acknowledge and respond to those, and then we'll hop back into the main point of our passage. Does that sound good? Sorry, "does that sound good?" is probably not the best question to ask when talking about *hell*...does that sound *helpful* to do, at least?

Okay. The **first and most common** pushback we tend to have towards hell sounds something like *this*: **isn't it unloving for God to send people to hell?** "If God is truly *loving*," some people say, "then he should *forgive* and *accept everyone*; not send some people away to eternal punishment." And **while that really does sound like compelling logic, I would argue that it operates on a somewhat shallow understanding of the word love.** Because *love*, at least *true* love, does a lot more than just wish people well and lead them to pleasant places. True love is much *deeper* than that. True love *does* much *more* than that.

We often operate on the assumption that love and judgment are polar opposites; they're diametrically *opposed* to each other. If you *love* someone, you therefore *cannot* ever issue any type of judgment against them. But is that *true*? **Let's say my son, Whit, has started skipping school regularly to go and steal stuff with his friends. He's currently seven, so I at least hope we're a long way from that happening—but let's say it is. Now, I love my son—like a lot. So, question: would it be unloving for me to tell him that skipping school to steal stuff is wrong? Because that's issuing a type of judgment against him. Would it be unloving, for me to punish him, in some way, for that? If his behavior continues, would it be unloving of me to allow him to experience at least some natural consequences of those actions?**

I think **most rational people would answer** all of those questions with "no." It's not *unloving* to tell someone that what they're doing is wrong (especially if it *is* wrong), and it's not necessarily *unloving* to allow people to experience negative consequences of their actions. In fact, I think **some people would argue** that allowing someone to experience negative consequences of their actions is sometimes the *most* loving thing to do for them. So while "love people, don't judge people" might make for a great bumper sticker slogan, it's a bit of a false dichotomy. **Love and judgment are not always opposites. Sometimes, they even work hand in hand.** So "is it unloving for God to punish people?" I think bare minimum we can say "not necessarily." **Sometimes love is allowing people to experience the consequence of their actions.**

But maybe to that you say, okay—but isn't hell too extreme of a consequence? It feels *disproportionate* to some of us. **Like the father who catches his kid smoking weed one time and tells them they can't ever leave the house until they're 18.** To some of us, it might feel like the "punishment doesn't fit the crime." Isn't *hell* too extreme of a

punishment? // To that, **I would actually say “no,** it isn’t.” In fact, **if hell is the place for those who have chosen to reject Jesus and his authority, then I think it is actually a perfectly logical consequence.** Think about it this way: **if you spend your entire life not wanting the peace, presence, and kingship of Jesus, then hell is when God lets you experience the fullness of what you want.** It’s when he “gives you over” *fully* to the choice you made on earth. God says essentially, “if what you want is a life completely *absent* of my rule and my reign, you can have it. In fact, you can have an *eternity* of it.”

But that also means an eternity *absent* of all the *good* things God created and allows people to enjoy. ~~The things he allows even his enemies to enjoy. Jesus, earlier in Matthew, famously says that “God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good.” He “sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”⁵~~ The world we live in right now is full of things that God, in his mercy, has allowed *everyone* to enjoy, regardless of their status with him. Things that theologians call “common grace.” **Things like life, breath, beauty, creation, relationships, friendships, sex, food, drink...and the list goes on.** All of these things that God allows all of us to enjoy simply because he is gracious. Whether we realize it or not, everything you and I *love* and *enjoy* about the world exists because God *allows* us to have and love and enjoy and experience all of those things.

But here’s the thing: **if we spend our entire lives** *rejecting* God, *refusing* to acknowledge him as the giver of all of those things...there will come a day where he allows us to experience the full consequences *of* that rejection.⁶ Which also means *no* him, *and* *no common grace gifts from* him anymore. *All the things* that God is patiently allowing us to enjoy in the here and now will be taken away. That, in essence, is what hell *is*: permanent separation from God and all that God gives. In the language of Matthew 25, it’s *departure*: Jesus says to people, “*depart* from me.” **And if you think about it, it’s not an extreme reaction at all; it’s actually an incredibly logical consequence of our choices. If we want life without God, God gives us an eternity without him. You just may be surprised at all that you lose when you lose God.**

Plus, I just want you to **think with me** for a second **about the alternative** to all this. Let’s just imagine, for a second, a world where *hell isn’t* a reality. Where there is no substantial consequence for evil or sin or anything of that nature. Put yourself there with me, mentally. **Imagine with me a God** who creates everything you and I know. A God who, with his own breath, breathes life into you and I; puts literal air into our lungs so that we come alive. Imagine a God who puts human beings he created into a garden where he

⁵ Matthew 5:45b

⁶ See Romans chapter 1.

has provided for them everything they could ever need, want, or hope to have—including unhindered access to *him*.

And then, imagine that God *watching* as those humans turn their back on him completely. **Imagine them taking every single thing that he meant for good, and twisting and distorting it towards evil.** Imagine watching those humans *hate* each other, *hurt* each other, *harm* each other, *abuse* one another. Imagine watching them steal, kill, and destroy everything around them. Imagine them wreaking devastation on the good world that he made, wreaking havoc on everyone, including themselves. Resulting in *unthinkable* horrors like destitute poverty, injustice, sexual abuse, racism, sexism...on down the list. And imagine him watching all that play out for generation, after generation, after generation, at a global scale, throughout history.

You **have that picture in your head?** Okay, now imagine God witnessing all of that and his response being, “meh, not a big deal. I know that feels like a lot, but I’m much too loving of a God to be bothered or angered or disturbed by any of that. I just choose to think positive thoughts. I’ll send them my good vibes; that’ll help!” How do you *feel* about that picture of God? Does that feel like a *good* God to you? It doesn’t to me. **Theologian Fleming Rutledge** puts it this way. She says:

We must believe in hell because there is no other way to take seriously the nature and scale of evil in the world. We must believe in hell because there is no other way to do justice to the victims of darkness. We must believe in hell because, without it, Christian faith is sentimental and evasive, unable to stand up to reality in this world. Without an unflinching understanding of the radical nature of evil, Christian faith would be nothing but a suburban bedtime story.

You see, **this is why, in many, many parts of the world**—where people are faced with injustice after injustice after injustice, right before their eyes—*their* hang-up with the God of the bible is not that he’s too just; it’s that he’s too *merciful*. To *them*, the *irrational* thing is that God would see it fit to show some people *mercy* who are *responsible* for evil. *That*, to them, is the unacceptable thing about the God of the bible.

And **maybe you feel like “okay, but I haven’t committed** any grave injustice; *I’m* a pretty good person, all things considered—it’s not *my* fault the world is the way it is.” **See, but** that’s part of the problem. **Of course** we don’t think we’re that bad: no one ever does. As the popular saying goes, “no single raindrop ever feels responsible for the flood.” **All of us in the room are likely responsible for far more evil, far more pain, far more injustice, far more brokenness than we ever care to admit. We’ve just gotten really good at convincing ourselves otherwise.** And a God who could witness a world full of

that and not be moved by it—not be *angered* by it even—would *not* be a God worth worshipping. Just like we are angered by injustice and hate and brokenness, God is too. And whether we realize it or not, we wouldn't actually want it to be any other way.

/ But **maybe your concern is more practical** in nature. Maybe to you, the question is **doesn't believing in hell make people unloving and cruel**, as a *result* of believing in it? Like as soon as *people believe in hell, they start yelling at people on street corners with bullhorns. It gives them license to condemn people in the here and now, because they believe that those people are going to be condemned by God in the future.* So doesn't believing in hell make people unloving?

There are probably **two different ways to answer** this one. First, do some people use the existence of hell as *justification* for being unloving towards others? *Absolutely.* I don't think there's any way to argue otherwise. But second, and I think *this* is the more *important* question to answer: *should* believing in hell make people act that way? The answer *there, I think*, is an undeniable “*no.*” **Believing in hell does not automatically make people mean, unloving, or cruel.** In fact, the *Scriptures* make precisely the *opposite* point. In **Romans 12**, Paul says this:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for (what?) God's wrath (i.e. hell), for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (So) On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.⁷

Do you hear what he's saying? He's saying that **when you truly understand** that God will have the final say—that *he* can be trusted to settle the score, and therefore *you* don't *have to*—what does that free *you* up to do? In *Paul's* mind, it frees you up to *love*. To live at *peace* with others. To do *good* towards others. To *feed* the hungry, to give *water* to the thirsty—even towards those who consider themselves your *enemies*. **When you understand the fullness of God's justice, you know you can entrust that justice to him.** So does believing in hell make people mean and judgmental? It *shouldn't*. When seen *correctly*, it has precisely the *opposite* effect: it makes you the most *loving* type of person the world has ever seen.

⁷ Romans 12:17-21

Which **brings us full circle** back to Jesus' main idea in this passage. **That the mark of whether or not a person truly knows and trusts Jesus is their love. Specifically, their love for other followers of Jesus.** *That*, according to Jesus, is the tell-tale sign of whether or not someone has encountered the true, saving grace of God: their *love* for each other. He puts it even more succinctly in the gospel of **John, chapter 13**:

*“A new command I give you: **Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**”⁸*

‘This is how people will *know* that you’re *my disciples*,’ Jesus says. **‘By your love** for one another.’ So we’ll just land our time together here, with this question. **Based on Jesus’ metric in Matthew 25, have you encountered the saving grace of Jesus?** Which is to ask, **do you love other followers of Jesus?** Now—let’s **remember that the bible defines love** a little differently than our *society* does. In *this* passage, love is *feeding* someone when they’re hungry. It’s giving them something to *drink* when they’re thirsty. It’s inviting them *in* to your home and life when they’re a stranger. It’s providing for them *materially* when they’re in need. It’s *caring* for them when they’re sick. It’s going and *visiting* them when they’re in difficult circumstances.

Love, in other words, is far **more than just having pleasant feelings** towards other followers of Jesus. **It’s more than just going “oh yeah, those City Church people—I really like them. They’re cool. They make me feel good. Those people in my LifeGroup: they’re fun. I like hanging out with them when I’m not too busy.”** All of that is great, and I *hope* you feel some of that towards those people. But biblically, that’s not *love*. That’s *affinity*. That’s *friendship*. That’s having *acquaintances*. **Love is actively preferring someone else’s wellbeing, sometimes even at the expense of your own.** Love is shown in *intertwining* your life with other followers of Jesus, such that you are keenly aware of their needs and actively look for ways to meet those needs whenever possible.

To put it another way, *biblical love* is often **demonstrated through sacrifice.** Through *action*. Through tangible, hands-level care and provision. Remember those words from 1 John from earlier: “Dear children: let us not love with *words* or *speech* but with *actions* and in *truth*.” So with *that* definition of love in mind, let me ask you *again*: **do you spend time loving other followers of Jesus? Is your life intertwined with theirs in such a way that you *know* about—and seek to *help meet*—their *needs* as they arise? Is that a consistent characteristic of your life? Not “do you do that *perfectly*?”—*none* of us do. But “do you do it *consistently*?”**

⁸ v. 34-35

Because according to Jesus, **that is the mark** of a follower of Jesus. **Not just whether or not we made a spiritual decision at some point to invite Jesus into our hearts. But whether or not his heart has become our heart.** Whether or not we embody the posture *he embodied towards us*. Because the operating *definition* of love we work from as God's people is the love of Jesus. The love that *he embodied towards us*. That's where we start. As it also says in 1 John:

This is love (here's our definition): **not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son (Jesus) as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since **God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**⁹**

That's the idea. If you want to know what love truly *looks* like, **look no further than the cross** of Jesus. Where God loved the world, such that he sent his only son to prefer *our* eternal well-being to his *physical* well-being. Where he would abandon *everything*, including his own life, so that we could know, love and follow him. Where he endured hell on earth, so that those who *trust* him would never *have* to. *That* is love. That's the love that *saves* us, the love that *rescues* us from our sin, and the love that motivates us to live the same way towards each other.

So **every week** as a community, **we go to the tables** throughout this room, and we remember the moment when Jesus abandoned it all for us. When he went to the cross, where his body was broken and his blood was spilled, for *us*. In the grandest demonstration of love this world has ever seen. And as we go to the tables, we're reminded that in the same way Jesus *loves us*, we also are invited to love *one another*.

Let's ask for his help together, shall we? Let's pray.

⁹ 1 John 4:10-11