

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2018

Series: Developing a Servant's Heart

1. Saved to Serve

Ephesians 1:1-14 (NIV)

Acts 6:1-7 (NIV)

One day a taxi driver died and went to heaven. As St. Peter was evaluating him, he gently closed the book and said, "Well done" and gave him a beautiful, white satin robe and golden rod as a staff. The preacher who was standing in line behind thought to himself, "well, if he got those great treasures, imagine what I'll get."

As the preacher was being evaluated, St. Peter closed the book with astonishment and said, "Not so good", and gave him a cotton robe and a stick as a staff. The preacher said, "I don't understand. I lived a good life and worked to please. I **served** Jesus as instructed and I enjoyed being God's **SERVANT**. Why did that cabby get a greater reward than I?"

St. Peter said, "Oh, that's easy. **When he did his job people prayed. When you did yours, people slept.**"

**Hopefully no one will drop off for forty winks while I do my job this morning.**

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We're starting a **new sermon series** that will take us through to Easter, with a wee break in the middle of it. It is all **about developing a servant heart.**

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I have come here to Gillespie **to serve as your pastor**, and I do so as a minister of the Word, and of the sacraments. My **service** is to seek God, and discern what and how he wants me to lead and shepherd here in Dunfermline.

I have been impressed with the **desire** to serve the community by this church. I have been impressed by the **desire** for prayer, for mission, for growth, and I guess most churches would desire this – yet you have gone through a period in the recent past where you have not served well.

You have not served one another well and the scars of that are still, to some extent, evident.

Don't worry – I do not intend to go over the past, or to seek to redress you for it – but what I do want to do over the coming weeks is shine a light on God's calling upon our lives.

God **wants us to be a church** that not only serves our community – but first of all **serves HIM** – our God, our Lord and creator – **and also serve one another** – fellow sisters and brothers in Christ.

**If we cannot serve one another in love - how can we expect** those outside to see us and understand our service to them?

So come join us each week, listen as we unpick what it means to develop a servant heart, and let's change this church and our community together.

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So, what do I mean when I say serve ...

**What is service** – and what connotations come to mind when we hear the word servant?

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Today's sermon title is **Saved to Serve** so let's break this service stuff down and answer two questions and one statement:

First – **why does God save us?**

Second – **what is the purpose of being saved** and,

Lastly concluding with the sermon title – **Saved to serve.**

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## **ONE.**

**So, first** – why does God save us?

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The opening of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church gives an opportunity to understand Pauline theology: behind the purposes of God.

The opening verse says why Paul was an apostle of Christ –because it was **the will of God.**

God's will, is perhaps one of the most important aspects of His being to understand.

**The will of God is to be in a relationship with creation** – not that His will overpowers us to be in a

relationship with Him, but rather through our free will we are invited to in a relationship with Him - for all people, for all creation.

Paul's opening goes on

*"To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**"*

The letter is specifically address to the church in Ephesus, but the sentiment is clear – Paul is writing this message to **God's holy people** = the **faithful** in Christ.

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The faithful in Christ belong to God ... do you belong to God?

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Through the centuries the Gospel message has been heard and accepted by many – yes there have been disagreements over interpretation and even heresy at times – but ultimately followers of Christ both in the past and today have been led to the truths of God – the truth that God's grace and peace is available to all.

This grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ – demands a response.

God's act of grace may demand a response!! **But that response remains our choice.**

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We can choose to ignore or accept the gift – only if we accept His grace will the peace of God come upon us.

The Greek ***Eirene*** for peace denotes the absence of conflict, especially between humanity and God – **a safety, a wholeness, a wellbeing** found in the healing nature that originates in God the Father.

It originates in the Father, because He is the creator.

Paul writes that God "*chose **us in Him** before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless*" – an ideal perfect relationship founded in love.

But we are chosen **in HIM** – emphasising that **salvation is dependent on God** – on His grace.

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Paul continues that God "predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ".

Words like predestined – chosen – adoption underscore God’s activity in setting apart people for himself, yet doesn’t mean our lives, the minutiae are predestined, set out before us and unable to change.

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This text talks about God’s will for the church, those collectively who are in Christ, rather than individuals - that His church are adopted as His children – despite our fallenness and separation from God.

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Election takes place **in Christ** and **through Christ** – so therefore individuals are not elected and then put in Christ, BUT are IN Christ and therefore elect!! – that is **SAVED – In Love.**

This is complicated theology but the essence is simple.

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**So the reality of why God saves us is this – the offer of salvation is because he LOVES US.**

We are his creation – he desires a relationship with us, despite our separation from Him by our sin; How - in Jesus we are redeemed and made righteous before the Father, and open to His love.

**The purpose of God's electing activity is to reveal his own character as a loving saving God.**

This basic founding theological relationship is right here in the opening verses of Paul's letter to the Ephesians – read it this week. Let it sit with you and know you are loved by God...

## **TWO**

Which brings us to our second point. **What is the purpose of being saved?**

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Many people think the reason for being saved in Christ is to avoid hell after death and to head to the calmer, more enjoyable experience that we know as heaven.

Yes, eternal life is part of God's plan for us but not the sole reason for our salvation.

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**We are saved so that we might also be redeemed** – made holy and righteous before God. Now these words might seem to be highfaluting but in essence they are simple.

**The offer of salvation is a simple, grace filled offer made through the perfect love of God, by the sacrifice of His Son.**

**Our redemption is also simple - that by accepting Jesus as Saviour and Lord we are set free from sin, so that we might live a righteous life before God.**

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But if God's purpose was just to save us so that we might go to heaven, He surely would be doing us a favour by saving us, then immediately slaying us – so we could head straight to heaven.

So, **there must be another purpose** – and it is this –

**We are saved, that by being so we might bring God glory.**

**Yes – that's right BRING GOD THE GLORY.**

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Not because God is some egomaniac who needs the attention, like some rock star or actor who just revels in the glory of human adoration. No, **God's desire is that we may manifest His character through our personalities and gifts.**

When we allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us and are vessels of His love – **we reflect**

**His compassion, love and mercy to others** – and by doing this we are surely bringing to Him all credit, honour and glory.

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As the closing words of the passage from Ephesians says

***When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.***

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So God saves us because he loves us and we are saved that we might bring glory to God, which brings me to the last point – **Saved to serve**

### **THREE**

So, HOW do we bring this glory to God?

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I have already said we reflect His compassion, love and mercy to others. But in practical terms how is this achieved?

Our church today, the worldwide church, was started by the teachings, the miracles, the wisdom,

the death, resurrection and ascension of one man – Jesus Christ.

But we go on to read in the book of Acts about the spread of the gospel message.

People were drawn to The Way – the Messiah who was God incarnate – and the church began to grow. The Church was the people of God reflecting the uncompromising grace, mercy, peace and love of God.

It had grown from the apostles and around 120 followers (Acts 1:12) to around 5000 in Acts 4:4 pulling together the Hebraic Jews – the Aramaic speakers as well as the Hellenistic Jews, likely to be Greek speakers from the Jewish diaspora.

The issue in our reading from Acts 6 was the daily distribution – which could have been about finances or food, but whichever it was, it was not being done evenly –

So the solution – to seek seven men with spiritual authority - full of Spirit and wisdom to deal with the daily distribution so that the apostles could continue with the ministry of the Word of God.

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The solution was **recognising gifts and then serving appropriately**. There was no sense of

inequality or superiority implied for the two differing roles – but rather the **service being offered was with authority of the Spirit.**

The point was to **have enough people serving the community that was growing beyond the capabilities of the leadership**, and therefore serving a growing kingdom.

In the last verse we heard this

*"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."*

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I've been here at Gillespie 10 weeks – 70 days – and during this short amount of time I have got to know a few of you quite well, a few more just a bit, but many of you I still have to get to know.

It will take time to get to know your gifts and talents, your likes and dislikes, your hopes and fears – and it will, I pray, be a joyous and wonderful journey we make together in the Lord.

But what I have discovered in my short time here is that Dunfermline is a place of need – a place of physical need for so many and like all over our world a place of inequality of provision...

... we are meeting some of those needs through F3; the Glen; companionship through the Guild and Wednesday Fellowship; provision to meet needs through the use of our buildings... but we know we could do more.

Dunfermline, like everywhere in our world is also a place of spiritual need – a community that needs the Good News of Jesus – Christ and Lord....

... and we are meeting some of those needs too. Through Sunday worship, through monthly praise and prayer; through our young people's groups ... but again we know we could do more!!

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God calls us all into a loving relationship with Him – that, we might be saved for eternity beyond our earthly lives, so that we may bring Him all the glory...

... and **the only way we can do that is following Jesus and becoming more like him.**

Not by the outward sign of what Jesus did – by preaching and teaching, by healing – **but by rather by seeking to manifest in us the motivation of Jesus - SERVICE – by developing a servant heart.**

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**Jesus did not serve in order to call attention upon himself – he poured out his life in service that others might be saved.**

God calls us because he loves us, not that we will be exalted, but that we might serve others. Even if this is just one person at a time, we will bring glory to His name.

I will be seeking to deepen our understanding of service over the coming weeks – and praying to discern God’s call upon THIS church community to serve Dunfermline – practically and spiritually in the coming years.

I pray you will also seek God’s will over the coming weeks and months as to how you can serve the Kingdom.

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A story to close

A man was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up. Left on the sand by the receding tide the starfish were certain to die as the sun dried them out. The man also saw a boy picking up starfish and flinging them back into the sea. Planning to teach the boy a little lesson in common sense, the man walked up to the boy and said, "I have been watching what you are doing, son. You have a good heart, and I know you mean well, but do you realize how many beaches there are around here and how many starfish are dying on every beach every day? Surely such an industrious and kind hearted boy such as yourself could find something better to do with your time. Do you really think that what you are doing is going to make a difference?" The boy looked up at the man, and then he looked down at a starfish by his feet. He picked up the starfish, and as he gently tossed it back into the ocean, he said, "It makes a difference to that one."