

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

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Pastor Don Schiewer

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Well I am really thrilled to introduce to you today's guest speaker, which is my friend Pastor Don Schiewer. Don is the pastor of Dust Church in Toledo, Ohio and the co-host of the very popular podcast, "Evangebros" [laughter]. And I will try to be very brief because what he has to say to you is much more interesting than what I have to say to you, but I do want to honor Don and say to you that Don is a not only a brilliant student of the Bible but a brilliant teacher of the Bible whose love for the text is contagious, and who is not only smart but also very pastoral. And that to me is a really admirable combination because it's one that, frankly, you don't see terribly often, and so thank you. Would you welcome Don Schieffer to Artisan Church [applause].

[Voice of Pastor Don Schiewer]

As Scott mentioned, the fabulously popular Avenger Bros. I shared in the first service that Rochester is actually the second leading city of listeners — with 5 [laughter] and I've logged on three times since I've been here. But thank you guys for having me. This feels like home away from home for me because of my relationship with Scott and with many of you. So, just thank you for letting me be here. One thing to get on the table immediately with you is that I like to ask questions and I like to ask questions and get your responses, so when I ask something it's not rhetorical. I'd really love to hear your thoughts. I believe very deeply that collective wisdom is way more significant than individual wisdom, so feel free to participate as much as you want and feel free to even interrupt if you want clarification of something. So how many of you are familiar with the passage in Philippians where it says, "Work out your salvation in fear and trembling"? Okay, so here's your first question, ready? What has that meant to you? How have you heard that when when someone says that if someone especially if it's quoted *at* you, which feels very different than being talked about *with* you. So how does it feel, like what does that carry with it. Any thoughts?

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

Congregation Member: It feels like the stakes are high. If you mess up, it's not good.

Pastor Don: Oh yeah, definitely the stakes are high. Anybody else?

Congregation Member: It's scary.

Pastor Don: It's scary. Yeah, absolutely.

Congregation Member: You're in fear and trembling with humility. Being conscious of the fact that we're very fallible, and have a realistic view of ourselves.

Pastor Don: Yeah, excellent. Anybody else?

Congregation Member: If people aren't knowledgeable about the rest of the Bible, that can turn them off because they don't understand what "fear and trembling" means.

Pastor Don: Yeah, sure. And I'm speaking in a church so I assume that you aren't all that familiar with the Bible [laughter]. Just joking. Not really. [To congregation member] Did you have something?

Congregation Member: I don't know if I'm reading too much into it, but it's not only got that element of like being afraid when you're trying to figure out what's going on but, like you got to do it by yourself.

Pastor Don: Yeah that's interesting, yeah. What about if someone were to say to you (because I always find this interesting), if someone walks up to me and especially if they begin the conversation this way because they say, "Are you saved?" Like, how does that feel? What is going on there? [To congregation member] Yes?

Congregation Member: It's like "dog whistle language," like a code word for, "Are you in or are you out? Are you on my side or are you not?"

Pastor Don: Right. When someone asks you that, it's this coded language of clear parameters or which side of the fence do you stand on? Absolutely. [To congregation member] Yes?

Congregation Member: It might be my specific disability experience but sometimes when people ask if I'm saved they say, "Well if you were then maybe you'd be healed."

Pastor Don: Oh...yes, so sometimes that is played off when people make a decision about you. And so when they ask you that question, it's a leading question to the next one which is something about healing or correcting something about you. Absolutely. It rarely feels good.

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

Like how many of you if someone walked up and said, “Are you saved?” that you're like, “I'm so glad you asked me that today! [laughter] I was wondering if anyone was going to do that today.” Let me talk to you a little bit about that Philippians passage. So in that Philippians passage there's two main pieces to it. It's, “Work out your salvation in fear and trembling.” So I want to leave the work out your salvation for a moment and talk about that fear and trembling piece. So my expertise if you could call it that, is in Second Temple Judaism and one of the rabbinic processes for studying scripture is that you look at the first time a phrase is used in the Bible and then that way of being used ends up defining that word or that phrase for the rest of the times that you read it. And so the first time, does anyone want to take a stab at it? The first time that the phrase “fear and trembling” is used in the Bible? Yes?

Congregation Member: Was it with Moses with the Israelites during the Ten Commandments?

Pastor Don: Weren't you in the first service? [laughter] I clearly am not good at this. Have a nice day. No, it's actually earlier than that but great guess. It's not in Exodus. [voice shouts “Genesis”] Genesis, yes! Anyone think that they can narrow it down? Now no one else is brave after I chastised you [laughter]. This is why I'm not good at this.

Congregation Member: Would it be after Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit and were hiding from God?

Pastor Don: It is after that, but it's not in that story. Anyone else? One last guess? It's actually post Flood and God says, “Now the animals will live in fear and trembling of you.” Okay, so let's think about this because as I like to say, it's not that we all of a sudden became puppy kickers that we weren't before the Flood and now after the Flood we're just kicking puppies right and that's why they're afraid of us. So what do you think it is that makes this statement be true? What do you think it is—what's fundamentally changed in the relationship between humanity and the animals? I'll give you a quick hint; it's not that in that same text that says, “and now you may eat them.” It's not that part of that. Frankly, I think that is a little scary. But what do you think has fundamentally shifted? Why would animals live in fear and trembling of humanity now? Yes.

Congregation Member: Supposedly, they were wiped out because humans got so horrible that God couldn't stand it anymore. So now their livelihood is dependent on humans not being so bad anymore.

Pastor Don: Excellent. If you hand out stars, that's a star [laughter]. So absolutely. So whose fault was the Flood? Humanity's, right. And so the livelihood, the ability to thrive and flourish is now dependent on humanity's greed, selfishness and behavior. Sound familiar at all to our

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

current situation in the climate of the world about whether or not animals are dependent on our own greed and selfishness of whether or not they'll survive the next century, right? And so here is this fear and trembling that the animals have to have, that in some way their very existence is going to be within the hands of humanity. So now if we add that picture to the Philippians passage that you are to work out your salvation in fear and trembling, we're starting to draw the picture a little bit. And maybe it doesn't necessarily feel any better yet, I hope we get to where it feels better. So the word for salvation in this passage is *sotirios*. And *sotirios* is a word that oftentimes gets translated as “deliverance,” which we’re okay with. Deliverance, salvation, we're good with those two things. And so, this is a picture of deliverance, but the first time that Greek word is used in the Septuagint, it is used in the passage about Isaac digging wells. And when Isaac is digging wells it talks about that, “he will go out from that land in peace.” So what is the Hebrew word for peace? *Shalom*. So the very first time that we see the Greek word *sotirios* used to translate a word in the Hebrew Bible to Greek is taking the word *shalom* and turning it into salvation, or deliverance.

This begins to change things because now if we read Paul and say, “work out your *shalom* in fear and trembling,” that seems almost counterintuitive—work out your peace in fear and trembling. Like those two things seem almost like oil and water. So let me add another piece. I realize that we're stacking a lot of pieces here and I hope we we get to the place where this begins to make a little more sense. That Greek word in almost every translation, I would say every translation I found of the Septuagint, it has been decided by the translators to translate that word *sotirios* in that moment as “safely.” And so this idea is *safety*. So we can imagine “salvation,” “save,” “safe” — those are all within one realm, so *sotirios* comes from this place of *shalom* and safety, peacefulness and safety. Now I don't know about you, but my experience growing up in the church is that we've done a really good job, particularly the more white and the more suburban your church is, the more likely you are to make the gospel spiritual and not physical, right? Or more likely to talk about everything from Scripture is all about a spiritual or heartfelt thing as opposed to a physicality of something. But the Bible’s first readers and listeners lived in an oppressed culture and they were in danger, and so much of this had the physicality of it.

And so to be saved in the Bible was to actually be rescued or to be physically saved from a situation. You and I, when we talk about, “Are you saved?” no one mentioned anything about physicality when we talked about it earlier, right? But imagine if we shifted this and actually started to apply that physicality to the text. And with the salvation, working out your safety in fear and trembling. So before I go a little bit further, do you have any thoughts about that so far? When we shift this to thinking about and discussing what Paul is saying? And by the way, the “your” there is plural, so I know you mentioned that it felt very individualistic, like it's all on

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

me but it's actually "you" — I don't know what you say in in Rochester. I grew up in eastern Pennsylvania so it's "yinz" [laughter]. And Ohio in Toledo where I live now it's, "you all." So what is it here?

Congregation Member: You's guys?

Pastor Don: You's guys? No, that's your speaker next week [laughter]. He's coming from New York. So in this picture how does it begin to fundamentally shift if it's "you" (plural) are to work out your safety in fear and trembling? What does it mean? How does that begin to shift things for you? Any ideas or thoughts?

Congregation Member: Well, the idea that it is wholistic takes the focus off of me and makes me think we need to work on this together.

Pastor Don: It takes the individual and makes it wholistic, and so we're doing this together, yeah. Anybody else?

Congregation Member: Those of us that have safety need to work to bring safety (*shalom*) to those who don't.

Pastor Don: Excellent. I owe you five bucks. It was a great response, another gold star. [To other congregation member) I'm sorry, I guess I owe you five dollars too, I don't want to diminish your answer. So this idea that those of us who already experience safety are responsible in some way to cultivate spaces that are safe. When I planted my church in Blacksburg, Virginia where Virginia Tech is, that's where my spouse was doing her Ph D. Our church and all of our leadership went to Virginia Tech and took Safe Space training. And in doing so, it had a couple of effects. One, we were the only place not on the campus of Virginia Tech that was considered a Safe Space in Blacksburg, which is kind of startling and scary, but that's what it was. But you can imagine a church in the south, if you know Blacksburg is, it's very southern Virginia, what would you imagine was the result of a new church plant that did Safe Space training in a very conservative southern place in Virginia? And I realize I'm making blanket statements; I hope I don't offend anyone by that, but can you imagine what some of the responses were? Any guesses?

Congregation Member: Not great?

Pastor Don: Not great — fair. First of all, we couldn't find a place to rent. And no churches would let us meet in their facility. Safe Space is about LGBTQ inclusion but it's also about racial inclusion, disability, everything. Obviously, mostly focused on LGBT is part of the reason that we were not any longer welcome in a lot of the spaces. And so this picture is similar to this

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

“working out safety in fear and trembling.” Think about—Ken, you were talking in the first service about the shooting in Aurora, Illinois and there were officers who ran into that setting right to do what? What was ultimately their goal? Safety, but they ran into danger to create safety. When we think about this we've often heard in a setting like that, you should have a level of fear. That it's actually healthy to have a level of fear if you are rescue worker, or you are a fireman, or whatever it might be — a postal worker around my dog [laughter]. And so, you should have a certain level of healthy fear so you actually function well. And so there's this picture of safety where they actually were working out your safety in fear and trembling. Do you see that?

Congregation Member: It raises your adrenaline if you run into a place like that and the fear actually raises your adrenaline and helps you function more.

Pastor Don: Sure, yes. And so this picture though is that we are called in some way. Paul is speaking to a people that he's saying that you need to work out the safety of the community. By doing what? Putting your own safety on hold. That's powerful. Like when we think about Rome in Jesus's day we imagine that there's one cross on a hill, maybe three if you've read the story, and that's it. But the roads in Jesus's day were lined with people being crucified. It was a daily reminder that Israel and any other people that were not Roman were second class citizens. And they hung people out there and let them die in the heat, and let the animals come and pick away at them to remind people of what their place was in culture. And yet you have this group of people who Jesus and Paul are talking to and saying, your role in this world is to carve out places of safety. Think about how powerful that is. How does that fundamentally begin to change the function of the church when the church's role is to stand in the margins, to put ourselves at risk in order to create a safe space for others? That we are called to be that officer, that rescue worker that runs into the fire in order to pull people out? That's actually our role. The physicality of the gospel is that we actually stand between the violence and the oppression in order to carve out safe spaces. So what are your thoughts? Any thoughts about that so far? Yes.

Congregation Member: The symbol of the ark really stands out to me as you talk about this. That one is saved not so much by what's going on inside the person but whether the person is inside the ark, and whether we as a community of faith can be that ark of safety for people.

Pastor Don: Yeah, can we be that ark of safety, absolutely.

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

Congregation Member: It makes me think of that question you asked at the beginning of, “Are you saved?” Switching that with coming from a space of listening versus telling, and it comes from a space of service versus teaching.

Pastor Don: Yeah. What she said was that it changes that phrase of, “Are you saved?” to, “Are you safe?” And I have to say that to me, I mean do you all agree that feels completely different if someone walked up to you said, “Are you safe?” Like that changes everything. And honestly, I think it might be harder for me to answer, right? It should be harder for us to answer if we're truly reflective. Am I really safe? Is that part of who I am? Thank you. Anybody else?

Congregation Member: Changing it to, “Are you safe?” makes it a process. Working out your salvation is a process.

Pastor Don: It's ongoing, there's a process. I mean the amount of times in the last decade that I've had to change my language as language has evolved, not because of being a snowflake but because of instead wanting to honor the people around me, right? That is constantly something working out of me.

Congregation Member: And “Are you safe?” has sort of a double meaning. Like are you a safe person for others to come to or also, are you experiencing safety.

Pastor Don: Beautiful, yes. So if you didn't hear that, it has a dual meaning. Are you safe for me to talk to because I need somebody that is safe or also, do you feel safe? That's a powerful question in the church, right? How comfortable would you feel if instead of passing the peace you pass the safety. That you in some way said, “Are you safe? Do you feel safe in this space?” and then engaging in a very meaningful and powerful way of like, “Well, then how do I stand in the margins and put my safety at risk in order that you can be safer?”

Congregation Member: I'm also feeling that the physicality has a sense of here and now that's more about our work and about what we should be doing.

Pastor Don: Absolutely, so then the safety is now, like you can't talk about a future safety — that does nobody any good. Like, hey, we're going to fix that thing that keeps injuring people. We'll get to it. Instead it's like, we need to do it right now. Yes, Scott.

Congregation Member (Pastor Scott): I think a lot of times people associate the phrase “Safe Space” particularly in the campus context that's sometimes lampooned, probably unfairly as, “We're going to keep you here in a space where you don't hear anything that offends you.” So

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

could you comment on the usage of that language or its understanding of that phrase in the church?

Pastor Don: Okay, so the question is how do we create a space that safe that a lot of people perceive that to be that you'll be coddled and you'll never hear anything that offends you. Well first of all, just in being in relationships with other human beings you're going to run into things that are offensive. The difference is whether or not the offensiveness is welcomed. That there's room to have something be said that is harmful or unhealthy, or even just kind of on that edge that you're like, "I don't really know." And help shape it and move it towards something that's an understanding of, why do I care about the way I speak? Why do I care about the way I behave? Why do I care about the way I engage others? And if you can shift it to the the deeper rooted thing away from just the words to, what is the the reasoning that we function this way? I think then there's a lot bigger gap to let people be engaged.

But I want to say one quick thing as an aside to that. I've often heard that if your safe space isn't tolerant to those who are intolerant then it's not tolerance, and that's just not true. We are very intolerant to intolerance in my church. You're welcome if you're intolerant if your intolerance doesn't create danger for anyone in our space. So that's a little bit of a more complicated situation. But any other thoughts? Yes.

Congregation Member: What I appreciate in the switch of the language (safe vs. saved) is I'm thinking of hierarchy of needs where safe is the first thing needed whereas saved, it has this connotation of being the last thing. They can't learn, they can't grow, they can't change. It's just more desperation; whether it's in calm or violence or war.

Pastor Don: Yes, thank you.

Congregation Member: I was going to add about the piece about the campus conversation that I think people conflate safe with comfortable. So, I think making that distinction that safe is not the same thing as comfortable because safety requires fighting against oppression.

Pastor Don: Thank you. Much better said than I said. Safety is not to be conflated with comfort. It's not the same thing. So, let me say something real quick here. One of the problems I think the church has is that we actually offer conversion but not salvation, right? We love converts but we're not good at the salvation piece. So what does Jesus say? Jesus mentions one time in the text about converts, and what does Jesus say about them? He says, "You go across the sea to make a single convert in order to make them twice the sons of hell as you." [Laughs] That is the church, right? And problem is because we extend *conversion* to people but not salvation. We've actually withheld salvation in many ways. You pass a homeless person and you

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

determine whether or not they are worthy of your \$2.00 sitting in your change jar because you're their moral agent all of a sudden. Cause God got asked that of you. And so all of a sudden you determine their worthiness and their value, and you're determining whether or not their worthiness and value has anything to do with their safety. And all of a sudden this begins to affect us — we're more interested in conversions than salvation. And that's really significant. If the church was not concerned about conversion, but continually to spread and move the circle out further and further of creating safety for people, that would be way more impactful on the world than having a whole bunch of "twice the sons of hell as you" (not you singular, you plural, clearly) [laughter]. But this is important for us. Kristen, you mentioned something so important earlier as being a teacher, that the safety of the kids is in jeopardy while you're not there with them, not just you but the school, and you as a teacher work out your salvation daily for those children. Think about that in our role, whether it be a school teacher who stands and wants more than anything for those young students to feel safe. Paul's talking to you, and I'm sure there's uncomfortable moments and stuff and so in that Paul is speaking to you and how is it that Kristen, how is it that you are actually creating safety for these kids? That is this picture. We immediately go to evangelism but I'm telling you when Paul's talking about us working out our salvation, Paul is wondering how are you when I'm not standing here (because that's the rest of the passage, when I'm absent)? What are you doing to continue to make this city where the people are oppressed, people are being slaughtered, people are being marginalized, people are being whatever. What are you doing to create safety?

And Paul's like, I am blessed that you continue to work towards safety in your community even when I'm not present. What does that mean for you? What does it look like in Rochester for Artisan and to be the community that Paul would write you and say, "To the community that has worked out their salvation in fear and trembling." What would that look like in Rochester for you to be a community that is constantly fighting and striving not to convert people but to create space that someone can feel loved, someone can feel heard, someone can feel present, someone can feel full, (and) someone can feel accepted? All of those things. That is the picture of salvation. When I think about Jesus, Jesus does the greatest demonstration of putting his own safety on the line in order to create safety. And his apostles all did the same thing — they were all martyred. They were all willing to die in order that others could feel safe. When we talk about it in that way, it seems so much more worthwhile.

So that's it, but I want to hear if you have any questions or if you want me to clarify. What are you thinking about? How does that affect you, if it all, and if it doesn't that's okay. It's quicker to lunch. Yes.

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

Congregation Member: Something that keeps coming back to me is when you were talking about peace, *shalom*. I understand the word *shalom* to mean wholeness, so that's the goal.

Pastor Don: Yeah, you can't have wholeness without safety. Yeah, absolutely.

Congregation Member: I've been struck with the thought of each community of faith being like an outpost or a colony of heaven so wherever God's people are, it's a foretaste of what heaven is like in terms of inclusion, celebration, and ultimately safety. So we're not so much trying to get people to go to heaven but we're having heaven come here in the locations where we live and more.

Pastor Don: Absolutely, thank you, yes. That heaven becomes these pockets around the world.

Congregation Member: It makes me think that fear and trembling no longer has to be something that has to be feared but something to be embraced because it's part of that salvation message.

Pastor Don: Yes, absolutely. I mean, have you ever had a moment where you overheard something or you witnessed something and you were a little nervous about stepping in but you stepped in and either stopped an argument or a fight or a conflict of some sort and you walked away feeling like I actually did something of value today? Whether it be you picket something and you're an activist in some way, or that there's actually physically something happening that you step in between — that moment that you put your own safety at risk in order to create and cultivate more safety gets rid of that fear and trembling. Yes.

Congregation Member: I'm thinking about a tension we haven't addressed in this community that we're trying to figure out how to address, I think. In forming a relationship with a local African American church in the city that racism is still a major issue. Trying to walk with them to help find safety for people of color. And we heard a couple of weeks ago from one of our community members here, Penny, who is a transgender person who is not welcomed by that community in any way, shape, or form. And how do we create and extend safety?

Pastor Don: Yeah, that's a complication when two communities are in need of safety and to make one feel safe might put the other at risk in some way. Clearly, that is a deep and complicated thing. I always say that if you can reduce your your expression of Christianity to a bumper sticker, you either have a humongous bumper [laughter], no judgement, or your Christianity is too easy. Creating safe space is hard. It is diligent work. It is an effort to do it, it is complicated. It's not just simple to say, yes I'm safe. You have to demonstrate it, you have to

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

live it, you have to navigate really complicated things in order to do it well. So I don't have an answer for you, I would just encourage you to continue to flesh it out.

Congregation Member: Continuing to put faces with ideas, my son [audio gap]...but he loves me so I think that has made a difference in his life more than any speech or growth or anything because he loves me and has to now wrestle with it himself about what he's going to do about it.

Pastor Don: Yes, I think putting a name or a personhood to something is really really significant.

Congregation Member: I'm curious. It doesn't seem like it's a very new idea but at the same time I don't feel like this is the way salvation is put forth and if the earlier church understood it that way, how did we get away from it to where we are today?

Pastor Don: That's an absolutely wonderful question. Scott, I know I'm couple minutes past time and I would like to address it because I think that's such a significant question. So the question is, the church clearly doesn't function this way and if the church did function this way earlier on and isn't now, why? I would say power and privilege. When we say, I love theology, we actually mean white theology. White people aren't used to hearing that used before anything. I mentioned "white music" at something I was and the musician was offended, and musician was white and it was written by white people and I was like, "It is white music." But I think that's part of it because if you're in power, you don't really feel unsafe about a whole lot of things. And so clearly salvation isn't about safety if you're in power and privilege; it's got to be spiritual. When Constantine made Christianity a state religion of Rome, all of a sudden the powerful and privileged were the ones that were professing this. Safety wasn't a concern. They had the best military behind them so they weren't worried about safety. And so it had to be something else other than safety, and the church has continued that.

But if you still go to any communities, any churches that are in a community where they face oppression for some reason, you're still going to have this expression of salvation where they will envelop the people there to create safe places at times. I think about the Freedom Riders, or I think about the Underground Railroad, or I think about any of these moments, or even like after 9-11 when there were lots of people surrounding mosques to protect them. This picture that when there becomes a moment that the power shifted in some way, you actually see Christianity function in safety and concerned about safety. The problem is we go back to our suburbs, we go back to our power and privilege and we no longer have to be concerned about it. For most of the people in this room, even if you happen to be in the queer community you often still function in power and privilege over a lot of other people. And I'm not diminishing that because the struggles are difficult and complicated, and so you're able to kind of disappear

2019-02-17 Is [Y]our Salvation Safe?

back into comfort. But there's a lot of communities that can't disappear into comfort. They live in fear and trembling all the time and it's not because anyone is working out their safety. It's because no one is working out their safety. So I hope that answered it in some way. It was very oversimplified.

Alright. Well, let me let me pray for you. I'm not really good at application. I would rather just talk about it and then let you have to wrestle with it and then I'm going to go home, it's fantastic [laughter]. But I really want you to wrestle with what it means for Artisan to be a perpetuator of safeness. Wouldn't that be great if that's how you were known? Let me pray. Lord, you are good. The fact that you desire that nobody should perish should have been a tip off to us that you desired the safety of all. Lord I pray that you forgive us for our selfishness, that you forgive us for not putting ourselves at risk in order to create safety for others. Lord, may this community become a community that works diligently to cultivate space that others can feel safe in. May this be a community that doesn't look for converts but looks for salvation. Lord, I love you, I praise you, I give you all the glory. Amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com.