

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**July 2, 2017**

**The Glory of Jesus is the Salvation of His Followers**

**John 17**

**Prayer:** Father, we just again thank you for your grace, your goodness, for who you are. And again once a month we gather to focus on what it is you've done for us at the cross, and so this is one of those Sundays and I just again pray for an extra measure of your Holy Spirit's grace. Come alongside us as we open up your book, give us the presence and the privilege of your Holy Spirit, open our eyes, deepen our understanding of what it is you've done for us and make it of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well once again it's the first Sunday of the month and this is the day that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and there for the last time celebrated a Passover supper with them as described in Matthew 26. It says: Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for

*this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*" And so Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and of his blood and then he asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they could symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood, and then he asked them to repeat the remembrance of this sacrifice on a regular basis and this what we call the Lord's supper, and we celebrate it once a month and we do it by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our own personal lives where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing those sins and then by participating in the elements. John 6:53 says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well we've made it to the 17th chapter of the gospel of John and Jesus is now praying his high priestly prayer and in verse 4, he says this, he says: *"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."* We want to spend some time this morning just looking at what it was that comprised that work. Baker's New Testament Commentary makes this amazing assertion on John 17, they say this: *"The glory of Jesus is the salvation of*

his followers." Now I just want you to think about this for a second. I mean, really the cross is a matter of hours away and the only one who knows this is Jesus. I mean, his disciples are absolutely clueless even though they've been told repeatedly exactly what is going to take place. And so Jesus is reflecting back on the three years of public ministry that is now coming to an end and he's laying out before his Father the work that he has done these last three years. It's all coming to a close now. And this is what he says in verse 6, he says: "*I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*" Now the work that Jesus was given to do was three-fold. *And His glory was the salvation of His followers.* The first part of his work was he was to reveal the Father. He says in verse 6: "*I have revealed you.*" Secondly, he was to seek out the specific persons that had been given him by his Father. Again verse 6, he says: "*I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.*" And thirdly, he was to demonstrate that they had received that revelation by their obedience. He says: "*They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*" This morning we want to look at all three and I want to start with the first at how Christ revealed his Father to us.

Many of you are -- we're dating ourselves, but many of you who are

older remember who Paul Harvey was. Paul Harvey was a well-known, revered broadcaster. And he used to tell a story, a Christmas story about a man dealing with a flock of birds. He tells his wife -- it's Christmas Eve and he tells his wife, you know, I've -- I just can't go through this charade any more. I'm not going to go with you to church. I just can't believe in a God who would become a man, it's just too far-fetched, too much of a fairy tale. I just -- I don't buy it any more and I'm not going. You go on ahead. And so his wife leaves, and he's there in his living room. And after his wife leaves it begins to snow, and it starts to snow more and more and now it's snowing furiously while his wife is away at church. He's sitting there in the living room, suddenly he hears a thump at the window and that's followed by another thump and yet another thump and soon he realizes that in the middle of this storm, there's this disoriented flock of birds that is looking for shelter and they're flying right into his storm window in his living room. And he sees them flopping around, and he feels a great deal of compassion for them. So he decides, I'll open up my barn, it's warm and it's safe, they can at least find shelter in the barn. But he soon realizes how hard it is to get them to understand that safety and warmth is right there in the barn. So he goes out with a blanket and he's leaping up and he's trying to catch them with the blanket so he can bring them into the barn and obviously that's to no avail and he starts to flap his arms to try

to shoo them into the barn and they just kind of scatter all around him and gets this brilliant idea and he goes running into the house and he gets bread crumbs, and he starts sprinkling them all the snow and he leaves a trail and it goes right to the barn. But the birds are so stressed out that they simply ignore it. And it's clear that they're stressed out, and it's clear that they're frozen, they're facing imminent death and that stresses him out to no end. But finally he thinks to himself, he says if only, if only I could become a bird. He said if I was a bird, I could explain to them that I mean no harm, and I could also offer them shelter and safety. And suddenly it dawns on him what God is telling us in *Hebrews 1:1*. There God says: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.* We are just like that flock of birds. And what God is saying here, he said, look, I've spoken to you every possible way that I can. I've spoken to you through my creation which shouts who I am. I've spoken to you through my prophets who told you who I was and who you are. I've spoken to you through angels. I've even spoken to you through donkeys. But the culmination of every single thing that I was trying to express to you about your desperate need of shelter and saving was my Son. I mean, he created the entire universe and he is the heir of all of creation.

He became one of you to point you the way out of the storm of your own fallenness into the warmth and safety of his kingdom, and for that you killed him. You didn't just kill him though. You first had to humiliate him by beating him. And then for sport you put a crown on his head not of gold but of thorns and then you dressed him up in a purple robe in order to mock the idea that he would even claim to be a king. And then according to Mark's gospel, it said: *Some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophesy!" And the guards took him and beat him.*

Now remember now where we are. What we're trying to do is we're trying to understand what Jesus is praying to his Father about. He's at the very end of his ministry. He's praying to his Father about revealing him. He says in John 17:6: *"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word."* Well, what a mocked, beaten Jesus is revealing about his Father is the width, the length, the height, and the depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is beyond comprehension even imagining the power it took for both the Father and the Son to simply sit back and absorb the insults and the beatings without responding, knowing it was well within their power and might to utterly block from existence even the memory of these people. But then Jesus would not have

accomplished what the Father gave him to accomplish. I mean, this mocking and this beating would all be part of that same accomplishment. This is how the prophet Isaiah put it. He said this: *He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.* You see, Jesus had revealed the Father. Again, John 17:6: "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word."

Secondly, we want to look at who the "they" are, how they got there and why. Who are "they"? Well, they are those who have been chosen of God, they're referred to as "the elect." This is a huge and has been a huge issue for the church for hundreds and hundreds of years. And 400 years ago, the doctrine of election proved to be so divisive that the church called a synod to resolve it. That was in 1619. And in 1619 the Synod of Dort resolved to answer the question of election this way. This was their statement on it. They said this: "Now election is the immutable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, he has,

according to the most free good pleasure of his own will, of mere grace, chosen out of the whole human race, (fallen by its own fault from its primeval integrity into sin and destruction), a certain number of persons, neither better nor more deserving than others but with them involved in a common misery, unto salvation in Christ; whom even from eternity he had appointed Mediator and Head of all the elect and the foundation of salvation; and therefore he has decreed to give them unto him to be saved." And if you understood that, you're a genius. That's a very, very complicated statement. It's 400-year-old English. But this is what they're trying to say. And what they were saying is out of the entire human race, according to God's good pleasure, God chose a certain number of people neither better nor more deserving than others to give to Christ to be saved. We who love the Lord Jesus Christ, we are the "they" of the Synod of Dort. I mean, we love God as the epistle of John says: *We love God, in 1 John 4:19, because he first loved us.* And he loved us before he gave us as a gift to his Son.

Now I recognize that it is more than a little disconcerting to be thought of as a gift. Where's my autonomy? Who am I? I'm in charge of me, am I not? What is this, I'm a gift? It's more than a little disconcerting to be thought of as a gift that God gave to his Son, but it's something that the Bible states unequivocally.

And when you think about it, it's astounding how many references there are in scripture to the idea that the elect are literally gifts given by God, the Father, to the Son. Listen to this. This is John 6:37. Jesus says: "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." John 6:39: "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day." John 10:27: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." John 17:2: "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him." John 17:6: "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." I mean it's almost as if God wanted to make emphatically certain the notion that we are believers because of what God has done, not because of what we have done. And God purposed before time had even begun to give to his son a vast number of people who would be put on earth for the express purpose of glorifying God by being that gift. Jesus's dialogue with his Father reflects the idea that God had gifted his Son with the most precious gift he could ever give him, creatures created in God's own image. Again, John 17:6: "They were yours;"

Jesus says, "you gave them to me."

Now we all know that the very first creature Adam rebelled and so polluted every subsequent son or daughter of Adam that they were all by natures rebels against their creator. But we also know that God gathered up twelve of these creatures who are known as the disciples and he gave them as gifts to his Son. And as we look at Jesus's high priestly prayer, we see Jesus clearly taking full responsibility for these creatures in his prayer. In fact in the prayer he singles out the one disciple who failed. This is what he says in *John 17:12*. He says: "*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.*" Jesus is obviously referring to Judas who was one of the twelve and who betrayed him. He's declaring that even this betrayal by a good friend was not the result of Jesus's failure to protect the gifts that God had given him but rather it was a fulfillment of prophesy from scripture. And we know that the scripture was originally prophetically uttered by David centuries before this. David said in *Psalm 41:9*: *Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.* Now David didn't know it at the time but he was uttering prophesy concerning the actions of Judas, something that would actually take place over a thousand years in the future. Well, the exact

incident, what we're talking about now had occurred only hours before at the last supper. And there Jesus in one last display of love and affection towards Judas gives him the high honor. He gives Judas the symbolic piece of bread. You see, dipping the bread and offering it to someone by the host was a sign of affection and honor understood by all in that culture. And that night was the very night that Judas would slip out and betray Jesus, and even though Jesus knew that fully well, he still extended that mercy to Judas. And Jesus is speaking to his disciples in *John 13* and this is what he says: "*I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'*" I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am." After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me." His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread, when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

So just as David prophesied over a thousand years ago, Jesus is now sharing his bread with a trusted friend who was going to betray him. We go on in verse 27, it says: *As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly."* But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night. Just think for a moment how incredibly gracious Jesus is to Judas, knowing what Jesus knows. And the only reason he expressed it to the disciples was so that they would eventually understand that there was nothing about the cross that was by accident or by mistake. That's why Jesus said in verse 19: *"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am."* What Jesus is stating in his prayer to his father is that he has completed the work of protecting him, of making sure that these precious gifts that the Father had given him were safe both physically and spiritually. I mean Judas was lost, but he was lost not through missteps on Jesus's part. Jesus says: *"While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by the name that you gave me."* Jesus also knew that that would include protecting the disciples physically as well. You know when the soldiers came for Jesus, Jesus made it crystal clear that it was his intention to

protect these disciples. In John 18:2 it says this: *Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.* Well, Jesus of course, he knows exactly who they're after. And he also knows that the disciples are in grave danger as well, and so he states this question emphatically not once but twice and he states it in order that the soldiers would narrow their focus not towards everybody but just to him. In verse 4 it says: *Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.* You see, so after identifying himself as the specific one being targeted, Jesus repeats the question once more specifically isolating himself in order to protect the disciples. Again, verse 7, it says: *And he asked them, "Who is it that you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you're looking for me, then let these men go."* This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: *"I have not lost one of those you gave me."* See, so precious were the disciples to Jesus so that even though they were all about to scatter like sheep and abandon him, he was thinking

specifically of them. He was thinking of them for two reasons. Number one, he deeply loved them; but number two, he understood these were gifts given to him by his Father.

As the elders come forward to distribute the bread, I'd like us to consider the privilege we have. We, too, are God's gifts to the Son. Also I'd like us to consider the warning that God gives about communion itself. It's in *1 Corinthians 11:28*. God says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* I say this every month, I say communion is an extremely serious undertaking, and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to court disaster. If you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you haven't by faith placed your trust in Christ as Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then just don't participate. It's okay. Nobody's going to turn their nose up at you. But on the other hand, I also point out that we can make the mistake of thinking that unless we are somehow spotless or perfect, we are unworthy to

receive communion. That, too, is the devil's lie. I mean, being a child of the King means that we are not without sin and that we never fail. It means we recognize that salvation is a gift and that no one is ever capable of earning it by -- quote -- "being good." I repeat this quote every month and I have not lost my affection for it. It's Dane Ortlund. He says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you" -- is what? -- "is knowing that you don't qualify. And the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that when we do fail, we understand that we have an advocate, we have somebody who is on our behalf, we also have God's spirit within us convicting us and we grieve as children who know we have a Father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So we've established the fact that being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're spotless and it doesn't mean that you're sinless. What it does mean is that we understand that when we do sin, we have an advocate, we have someone in heaven itself speaking to the Father on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And so because we have this alien righteousness, it doesn't belong to us, it belongs to him, it is given to us because we have Jesus's righteousness, we

are free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. You know, we say he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven. So as we prepare this morning, I want us to just take a few moments to ask ourselves this morning, do I give God the glory that he is due? Do I see myself as a gift given by the Father to the Son?

1 Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 23 says: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. So take, and eat.*

John 17:6, it says again: *"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word."* Now the word that Jesus was given to do was three-fold. First he was to reveal the Father. *"I have revealed you."* Well we know that God's great love and his great mercy were on display from the moment Jesus breathed his first breath as a baby to the moment he gave out his last breath as the sacrifice for our sins. Secondly, we know that he was to seek out the specific persons that he had been given by his Father. *"I have*

*revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.*" And as I've said, out of the whole human race, according to God's good pleasure, God chose a certain number of people neither better nor more deserving than others to give to Christ to be saved. And that leads directly to my third point. Thirdly, he was to demonstrate that they had received that revelation by their obedience. "*They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*" Jesus said the identifying characteristic of those who were given as gifts from Father to Son was not the depth of their theological knowledge, it was not the amount of rituals that they participated in but in fact it was the simple obedience that now marked their lives. And we've seen this in our study of 1 Peter. I mean again, this is Peter's introduction to the genuine Christians that were scattered due to persecution. This is what he says in 1 Peter 1:1. He says: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ.* He says elect chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, believers will always be sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ. It doesn't get more straightforward than that. But you might have a problem. I mean Jesus was speaking to his Father about the work -- his work with the disciples and he says, once again, he says: "*I revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave*

them to me and they have obeyed your word." I can think of an awful lot of instances where obedient seemed to be anything but what the disciples were. I mean how about the most basic command that Jesus could have ever given them. He says in *John 14:1*, he says: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me." Well one thing that we know is that literally within hours after Jesus's high priestly prayer, the one in which he's extolling the disciples' obedience, well, those same disciples disobeyed completely every aspect of that command. I mean Jesus asked of them three things. He says: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and believe in me." Well, when Jesus got arrested, their hearts were so deeply troubled that to a man they all scattered, their belief in God so thoroughly fell apart that they either ignored or abandoned all that Jesus had been teaching them. All of the times that Jesus had extensively detailed precisely and exactly what was going to happen ahead of time, and he did it just so that when it did happen, they would realize that all of these things were going according to plan. If you go back to *Mark 10*, it describes a discussion that Jesus is having with the disciples way ahead of time. Says: Again, he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who

will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise." Then in John 12 it says: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Then it says specifically: He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. You see, all of Jesus's warnings and all of his detailed descriptions about what would take place, they meant nothing to the disciples when push came to shove. I mean their hearts were troubled, their belief in God disappeared and their belief in Christ was summed up by this disastrous reaction to Peter, and we all know that Peter not once, not twice, but three times denied that he even knew Jesus. So why would Jesus say to his Father: "I revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." Jesus, thank God, does not judge us by our failures. In fact he judges us by our hearts. 1 Corinthians 4:5 says: Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God. You see, we have a loving and gracious heavenly Father who is anxious, anxious to forgive us.

Each month at communion I give out these scriptures and I quote

these two scriptures. One has to do with the Father and one has to do with the Son. 1 John describes the father: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* And 1 John 2:1 describes the Son. It says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* Jesus in his high priestly prayer, he's already advocating for the disciples, he's already advocating for these gifts that God has given to him, he's speaking out on their behalf, he's anxious to intercede. And this is why he can. You see, God looks far more at our trajectory than he does at our performance. God cares far more about the direction that you are going in than about the individual times you fall. I mean, much of the disaster that we see in the disciples' reaction to Jesus' arrest was because of simple disobedience because they failed and they failed miserably. I mean, their hearts were troubled, their belief in God was shattered, their belief in Christ was publicly denied and yet every one of the disciples save John went on to live such bold lives for Christ that they all died martyrs' deaths. And John would have died the very same kind of death except after being tortured for Christ, he was exiled. They lived out their lives loving Christ more than life itself. They did so because they knew firsthand what *Psalm 103* claims, which says: *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger,*

abounding in love. What is amazing, as you read the gospel accounts is you realize what happened, one of the first things that Jesus did after he rose from the grave, he put on a fish fry for the disciples. The very same disciples who abandoned him. If you picture the scene, Peter is still suffering this extreme guilt of having denied Christ and he's still bewildered at the whole idea of the crucifixion. So he decides to go back to the only thing that he's really ever known and that's fishing. And so he and his companions decide to go fishing and there they encounter the risen Christ.

As the elders begin to distribute the cup, let me read you this account. This is *John 21:1-14*. It says: *Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord,' he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there*

with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."

Now I remember first time I read that and I remember thinking, are you kidding me? I mean if that was me, the first things out of my mouth would have been, "Hey, guys, thanks for nothing." I mean, three years I put my heart into you, three years I revealed the Father to you in a thousand different ways, I feed thousands, I do miracles, I even raised the dead. I told you in detail ahead of time exactly what was going to happen and when it all started to unfold, you to a man all bolt. So thanks for nothing. Well, you can thank God that I'm not God and that Jesus is God, because we have a gracious, loving Father and a forgiving God, a God who says those who understand, those who have been chosen as God's gift to God will sometimes fail and fail spectacularly, but they will always pick themselves up again. Their trajectory may involve multiple failures but the direction will always eventually be toward the kingdom and not away from it.

Here's the big question: How do I know I'm one of those? How do I know I'm one of those who have been given as a gift by the Father

to the Son? Well, the answer is this: Obedience will always be a driving force in your life. Let's back to our scripture. "*I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*" You and I may mess up and mess up very, very badly just like the disciples did. But the trajectory of our lives will always be toward the kingdom and toward obedience. It's a legitimate question to ask yourself: Does that describe me? Is God's Holy Spirit within me? Because if God's Spirit is within you, you will always wind up choosing to obey. I mean you may wander and you may fail and you may fail badly and you may fail for years, but in the end, you will choose obedience because those according to 1 Peter who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit will be obedient to Jesus Christ. So I'd like us to take a few moments to simply ask ourselves a very simple question: Is that me? And again, if it's not, if God is convicting you that that is not you, I would be happy to sit down with you and get that right. We can get that right this morning. But I would ask that every one of us would sit here and ask God to convict me whether or not I am one of those to whom obedience is a drive given by the Holy Spirit. Take a moment to consider.

<sup>1</sup> *Corinthians 11:25* says: *In the same manner he also took the cup*

after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take, and drink.

This is the part we call heart, hands and feet, where we suggest a practical application to what it is to remember Jesus Christ. And I want to open up by reading one of Jesus's parables. This is Luke 14. It says: *Jesus replied, "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'* But they all alike began to make excuses. *The first said, 'I've just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'*" Now I want you to think about this. The guy says I just bought a field, now I'm going to go look at it. That doesn't make any sense. You don't buy -- you don't look at the field after you bought it. You look at the field first and then you buy it. *"Likewise it says: Another said, 'I've just bought five yoke of oxen and on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'*" Substitute a used car for used oxen. Who says, "Well, I just bought a car, now I'm going to go test drive it"? Nobody does that. *"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'*" He's not talking about boot camp, he's talking about a party. *"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant go*

out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out into the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house will be full. I tell you not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

A couple of months ago Elvia approached me about inviting the church to a corporate prayer for Asia Bibi. Any of those -- any of you who don't know who Asia Bibi is, she is a Pakistani mother of five, she was involved in a -- she was an illiterate farm laborer and she was involved with a bunch of Muslim co-workers who would not let her drink out of the same utensil, and they got into an argument and at some point in the argument Asia Bibi was quoted as saying, "Allah has never done anything for you. Jesus died for me." That was considered blasphemous, and so she's been on death row for seven years. The country, half the country is demanding that she be hung. In fact the governor who supported her was murdered by his own bodyguard and is now -- that bodyguard is now considered a hero in Pakistan. And so her faith literally hangs in the balance, and we've been praying for her for years. And a couple months ago Elvia said, I just really feel compelled by the Lord to set aside a day prayer and fasting for her. So we said,

"Go for it!" So we promoted it for about a month. Elvia came up, and she gave us a presentation. We even had it on the radio. It was supposed to be an evening of prayer for our persecuted sister. And Elvia at one point came to me and said, "How many people should I expect?" And I said, "Expect maybe five, at most ten. If you get more than that, consider that a blessing? Well, we had actually 17. Two came from another church, four of them were kids who are wonderful but they had no choice, mom and dad said you're going. So Elvia -- I said look, this is it. Elvia said a number of people had called to cancel. And I said oh, okay. Said, yeah, somebody said there was a threat of thunderstorms and somebody else said they were concerned that there might still be fugitives in the area. I said, "Really?" That's it, that's kind of like what Jesus is talking about. She said well, you know, maybe many people want to just stay home and pray, and I thought -- and again, the cynic in me thought about this quote I remember from a church leader many, many years ago who was talking to somebody who was extolling the virtues of being able to worship God in the woods or on the lake or at home, and this leader said, "You know something? You're 100 percent correct, you can worship God that way, but you won't." You know, the day after 9/11, we had a prayer meeting here that filled this entire church. I don't even know if it was standing room only, but you could not find a seat. It's the only time that's ever happened. And what I want to say tonight is a

difficult thing for me to say, but Friday night, literally 90 percent of the church was missing.

And I want to talk this morning about a famous phrase called "the soft bigotry of low expectations." It's applied to the civil rights movement but I can apply it as well here. There's also a technical term that I'm invoking right now, it's called preaching gone to meddling and I don't know if you've ever heard that phrase. It's -- if you slow it down, it's preaching gone to meddling. You can preach so far but you cross a line, you're meddling in people's lives. Uh-oh, that's preaching gone to meddling. We don't allow that. I'm going to do a little bit of preaching on the meddling tonight -- or this morning. And the reason why I want to do this is because this is communion. This is the time when we get to ask God to examine our lives. And so what I want every one of us to do here in this room this morning is to ask yourself before the Lord if wherever else you may have been Friday at 7:30, if that was more important than corporate prayer for Asia Bibi. And I don't want to hear what the answer was. That's between you and God. And I also want to tell you what you missed. Number one, we corporately obeyed God's command. This is *Hebrews 13* which says: *Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.* Number two, we corporately cried out for her release.

And number three and very, very important is we bound our hearts to her cause. I think you all understand what that's like. We know Gao Zhisheng, we know Saeed Abedini, we know Nabeel Qureshi because we pray for him and the same for Asia. What happens is you get invested emotionally in these people. Their plight becomes your plight, their joy becomes your joy, their sorrow becomes your sorrow. And we had an hour of prayer and I closed the prayer meeting by saying to those who were there, I said, you know, 2, 3, 400 maybe 500 years from now every one of us in this room is going to have to sit down specifically with Asia Bibi and we can tell them about June 30th, 2017 in Port Jervis. I think that's pretty cool. And so I want to ask again what was it about last Friday that was more important than that?

I want to just -- I want to bring this into perspective for myself. I want to tell you about my high school. When I was in high school, I played football. And we had two very, very vocal coaches, Tony Verducci and Pete Calcagno, and we were playing, we had a game once against a team that was -- we were supposed to be considerably better then, and I remember we got trounced and it was half time, and so we kind of trundled into the room at half time. And Tony was a person who would scream and rant and rave and Pete was very kind of quiet. And we're all sitting there and he's going up one side of us and down the other side and he's just reaming us

out. And Pete is standing there and there's a crate of oranges and he's standing behind him and he's very methodically peeling an orange. And as Tony is ranting, he's peeling the orange, and Tony's ranting, he finally taps Tony on the shoulder, and Tony turns around and he hands him the orange, he takes it and he hurls it at the wall as fast as he can; it splatters all over the football players. Pete just reaches down, picks up another orange and just starts peeling it as if it's nothing. Well, halfway between his rant he started to calm down. And what he said was, he said, "The reason I am so angry is because I know you're capable of so much more." He said, "You're so much better than this." I kind of feel like that coach. And I kind of feel like saying, "I know you are capable of so much more than this." One thing we knew about our coach is that he loved us and he loved our team and he was that kind of a person, and I love you guys and I love this church, but I know we're capable of better than that.

So what I propose is a do-over. I really want to do this again and I want to do this right and I want to say, you know what? We had 90 percent of the church here, it was as full as when it was after 9/11 and people were coming before the Lord pouring out their heart for a woman who's facing death. What are we facing? They're out of bagels at Wal-Mart. It's a crisis. We don't have a clue as to what these people are going through. And so what I'm asking is,

you know, in the fall we're going to be doing the prayer for the persecuted church. I want us to have a meeting where I no longer am guilty of the soft bigotry of low expectations. I want to have a meeting where my expectation is 90 percent of us are going to be sitting here, crying out to God on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are dying around the world. We have it so easy. There's no cops out there, there's nobody coming, bursting in there with guns. We've got nothing but ease and freedom and they've got nothing but persecution and fear and terror and torture and death. And so I'm just saying in advance, this fall when we have a meeting, a prayer meeting to corporately lift each of these people up, who's not going to be there? Raise your hand if you're not going to be there. See how psychologically I'm doing this? That's great. So I know every single one of you are going to be there and I think that's wonderful. I just want to pray that we catch what God is trying to tell us to do. We have been given this incredible privilege, this incredible freedom and we're capable of much better. Let's pray.

*Father, I just want to again thank you, thank you for what you've given us to, thank you for the fact even when we mess up and I think we messed up on Friday night, I know that you still love us because you love our trajectory rather than our individual performance. And so I just want to pray this morning, Lord, that*

*you would give us a passion and a heart for those like this woman who is sitting in a jail cell for seven years looking to be hung simply because she identified with you as her Savior. And so I just pray that you would give us a hunger and a heart and a passion for those folks and that you would be pleased to see this and that we would be able to share this. And I pray this in Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*