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

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**God's Solution to an Empty Life**

**1 Peter 1:14-19**

**Prayer:** *Father, we just again thank you for your grace, we thank you for your goodness, we thank you for especially your word, Lord that you have given us, your will, your will written, your will understood by the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray this morning, Lord, as again we're looking into your word that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit who makes this make sense. Father, accompany us, give us the ability to understand what you're saying and to again make it a permanent part of our lives, we pray, in Jesus' name.*

Well, we've been looking at the first chapter of 1 Peter, and our text this morning is 1 Peter 1:14-19 which says: *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as*

*silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

Well, we have been focusing on just what it means to have this reverent fear of God. And God gives us numerous reasons why for believers it's not fear of punishment that drives and undergirds us. *1 John 4:18* tells us: *There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.* The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We know as believers precisely where God's punishment fell. It fell not on us but on God himself at the cross. And because of the cross, we have no fear of God's punishment.

So why is it that God wants us to live in reverential fear? Well there's a whole host of reasons for reverent fear when it comes to God. We spoke last time of this fear of disobedience. Peter uses the phrase in verse 14 "as obedient children" because believers have been chosen by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, for obedience to the Son. So we fear disobeying the Father just like we would fear disobeying an earthly father whom we deeply love and respect. Well this morning we want to look a little deeper into yet another reason for reverential fear. It's fear of an empty life. *1 Peter 1:18* says: *For you know that it was not with*

*perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.* This morning I want to look first at the problem of an empty life and then I want to look at the solution to that problem.

So what constitutes an empty life? Well, an empty life is a life without purpose. And what is the solution to that problem? Well, it lies in finding life's purpose. God says the purpose that gives our lives meaning is praise, and the praise is directed at what Peter calls "*the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*" So we have the problem of emptiness due to a lack of purpose, we have God's solution in praise for the preciousness of the blood of Christ. We have the problem, we have the purpose, we have the praise and we have the preciousness of the blood of Christ. So let's see if we can connect all of the dots here.

First off we look at the problem. It's "*an empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors.*" You know Shakespeare described the emptiness of life and he described it extraordinarily well in *Macbeth*. He says: Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets (sound of car horn beeping) -- there you go. I'm not going to compete with that. I'm speaking about a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury. Isn't that

interesting. Shakespeare says of Macbeth: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." That's exactly what we just had. So what makes life an idiot's tale full of sound and fury signifying nothing? Well the answer is purposelessness. You know folks say if you aim at nothing, you are bound to hit it. And the "nothing" that almost everyone successfully hits centers on the purpose of life itself. If you don't know the purpose of life in the first place, you are never going to find life's significance. Peter says the blood of Christ has redeemed you from the empty life passed on to you by your forefathers. Well, just what does an empty life look like, and how does the blood of Christ redeem it?

How do you define an empty life? Empty compared to what? And how can we know what a full life is? You know I mentioned a number of times a beer commercial, it was very well known a few years back and there's this group of guys who are sitting around a campfire. They've obviously have been fishing for the day and one of the guys says, "Guys, it doesn't get any better than this!" But it does. I mean, I like to fish but if the deepest need of the human soul is met with a can of beer and a fishing pole then I've obviously missed my calling. I mean you might think I'm making too much of an empty platitude but the fact is many folks really cannot imagine

a life much better than what a winning lottery ticket could provide. I mean otherwise those tickets wouldn't sell out the way they do. And if you really want to understand how empty a lottery winner's life can be, just Google "lottery/misery." You'd be astounded at what happens to an awful lot of lottery winners. You'll be shocked by what you find. See, the problem is many of us don't really know what a good life is because we don't really know what it is that makes life good.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out a fact that we usually ignore, and what he said is: There is no such thing as abstract goodness. He says goodness always, always is a function of purpose. If you hand me a fishing pole and you say, "Is this good?" I won't be able to tell you unless I know what it's supposed to be good for. You know, if -- what its purpose is and if I'm living in the desert and if I've never seen water and I've never even seen a fish before in my life, I might look at that fishing pole and I might say, "Well, this is good for what?" I mean, is it good for planting crops? No. Is it good for hunting animals? No. Is it good for keeping me warm? No. How about protecting me from harm? No. So as I'm looking at this fishing pole, from my perspective and my ignorance, the fishing pole appears to me to be good for nothing. You see, it's only within the context of purpose that you can begin to know if something is

good. I can only know if a fishing pole is good if I know what the purpose of a fishing pole is, and once I know that its purpose is for catching fish, well then and only then can I evaluate whether or not it's good. I mean is this microphone good? Well, it's terrible for pounding nails, it's miserable for catching fish, but for picking up sounds and broadcasting, yes, it's very good. I mean that's its purpose and that's how we define whether or not it's good. And the very same principle applies to life itself. I can only know what a good life is if I know what the purpose of that life is in the first place. So now if man's ultimate purpose is to drink beer and catch fish, well then that guy's right, I mean, that commercial was accurate. If man's ultimate purpose, however, is something other, if it's something greater than drinking beer and catching fish, then it's not going to be enough for a good life. You see, any question of a good life without an examination of the purpose of life itself is pointless. And if we can avoid the question of ultimate purpose, we can kid ourselves into thinking that an empty life is really a full one. And we'll all nod our heads and say, "yes" when he says, "It doesn't get any better than this." But if we're willing to honestly ask what a good life really is, then we're also going to be forced to ask ourselves what the purpose of life really is. And the amazing thing is we're the only creature in all of creation who really has no idea what our purpose is. I've said it many, many times,

animals instinctually know what their purpose is based on their design. You know, birds fly, fish swim, hunters hunt, grazers graze. We humans, we are the only ones who are still wondering, "What were we designed for?" We're wondering that because we're no longer aware of what our purpose is. And if we don't know what our purpose is, we can't know if our lives are good or bad, full or empty. Why do you suppose Peter tells us "*You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you by your forefathers*"? I mean you think he's just trying to be insulting or is God telling us something about life's emptiness as we know it? You see, if anyone knows what our purpose really is, it's got to be God. And he made it very clear from the very beginning in Genesis 1 what our purpose is and this is what he says in *Genesis 1:26*. He says: "*Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*" See, only one creature in all of creation, only one creature has the purpose of bearing the "imago dei," the very image of God. That's us. And bearing God's image defines our purpose. You know, the *Westminster Confession* says: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. *1 Corinthians 10* says: *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* So it all has to do with glorifying God, that is manifesting God's character and his

attributes. That is precisely what bearing his image means. Simply put, my purpose, what defines my life is to put God's character and his attributes on display in my life. Jesus tells us in *Matthew 5:16*: "*Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*" See what he's saying there? Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and what? Glorify your Father who's in heaven.

And so the simple answer to the question: "What is an empty life?" is that an empty life is any life that doesn't have the glory of God at its center. A full life is a life whose purpose is centered on realizing what we were made for. And we humans were designed by our creator for the express purpose of glorifying him by bearing his image. And as soon as life goes outside the parameters of that purpose, we begin to embrace an empty life. And when you stay within the purpose of your existence, your life will be as good as it gets.

So big question is, okay, how do I do that? I mean, do I exchange my work clothes for white robes? Do I start practicing hymns? Do I start getting godly? That's what many folks think a God-centered life is and it's not. God's purpose for you and me is to bring him glory by displaying his character, whether I'm a butcher, a baker

or a candlestick maker. You see, God is glorified when we take our purpose into the marketplace no matter what occupation we have. And our primary goal should not be that calling or that career or that profession, it should be to bring the glory of God into that career, that profession, that calling. I mean, we are not just designed to do stuff. We are designed to bear God's image while we are doing stuff. That's how we bring glory to God. And furthermore, our task is far greater than simply doing our job well for God's glory. We are to bear God's image in a way that lets folks know that it is God at the core of our being and not ourselves. You see, we don't just let our light shine among men. We let it shine so that men may glorify God. But you know that also means that every single thing that we do is sacred, whether you're a homemaker or a laborer or president of the United States, we all have the same purpose, to bring God's glory into whatever it is that we do to bear his image for that glory.

Fast forward yourself to the end of your life and ask yourself: What was the point of this? What was the purpose of my life? If you can't say "the glory of God," you have by definition lived an empty life. You know, practically speaking if you knew tomorrow would be your last day on earth, would you live it any differently? I mean could you honestly say it would be a day like any other? You know if you can say that, well then praise God. But if you can

only envision a drastically different day than something actually is drastically wrong and the chances are good that you're leading an empty life. And worse yet, if you embrace an empty life, chances are you're going to pass on that same empty life to your children. I mean Peter tells us we've *been redeemed from an empty way of life handed down to us by our forefathers*. If I don't want an empty life for me or my children, then I have to learn to live my life here as a stranger, to live it as a stranger in reverent fear, because it's that reverent fear that will make all the difference in my life.

The solution to the problem of an empty life is understanding that our purpose in life is to praise and glorify God. Now that's the problem and the purpose part of the message. Next we have the solution. This is the praise of the preciousness of the blood of Christ. Now the problem with us believers when it comes to praising the preciousness of that blood is that we forget. We forget who we are. We forget how we got here. You see, what Peter is saying is you are to live your lives awestruck. Awestruck at the price that Christ paid to redeem us. That's not an easy thing to do, and we human beings have a limitless capacity to accept God's grace and then to expect it. You know, when the Israelites were wandering in the desert, they complained bitterly. They said God was going to let them starve. And God responded by sending

them bread out of heaven. Manna. In fact the word "manna" literally means "what is this?" It just rained down from the sky. God caused bread to rain out of the sky for 40 years. I mean that was grace extended and accepted. Every single day without fail, the manna was there. And on the day before Sabbath there was two days' worth of manna on the ground so there would be no laboring on the Sabbath. Well, the response of the Israelites was to accept this extraordinary grace and then over time to begin to expect even more. *Numbers 11* says this: *Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh, that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."* Wow.

You know it was R.C. Sproul who pointed out that the more grace we get, the more we feel entitled to. The more we are given, the more we expect. I saw this borne out repeatedly in my own home. You know one thing that my kids will attest to growing up, we were dirt poor. I mean we did as best as we could but God was incredibly faithful to meet all of our needs and one of the ways that he met those needs was that every Christmas -- and to this day I still don't know who it was, every Christmas a mystery person -- this is for about three or four years -- a mystery person left this huge

box on our porch that was filled with all kinds of goodies that we could never, ever afford to buy on our own. Instead of generic Cheerios, there was real Honey Nut Cheerios in that box, which was like a treasure, I mean, amazing stuff. There was all kinds of foods and little gifts for the kids and that kind of stuff. So I said every year for about three or four years it just wound up on the porch. And then one year it didn't. It wasn't there. My kids were upset. I mean, you would have thought we ordered this from Amazon and somehow or other they got it wrong. Grace accepted had very quickly become grace expected. And so I explained to my kids that just -- it had been there for a few years, there's no guarantee it was going to be there forever, and it didn't mean that it was going to be there forever. And the very same thing happened when we had a neighbor who out of the goodness of his heart, he used to plow our driveway after a snowstorm. You know, he did it the first day and then he did it the next day and he did it again and again, and he did it for a couple of years. And then one day we had a very large snowstorm and for some reason or another he couldn't do it. That meant that my kids and I had to get out there with shovels and do it and they were extremely unhappy. Where's Ted? Ted always plows. Where's Ted? It's not fair. I mean, this is grace accepted, grace expected. I don't think my kids are the exception at all. You know, tell your young ones that you're going to take them to Disney World and they will be blown away, they'll

be jumping for joy. Take them five years in a row and then in the sixth year decide, no, we're going to stay home this Christmas. My guess is you'll see firsthand what grace accepted, grace expected means. That's just part of our nature. And it inevitably leads to a "What have you done for me lately attitude." And this is not to say that we consciously disregard God's sacrifice for us. It's more that we unconsciously forget about it. And the very scripture that we read this morning in *Psalm 103*, David says: *Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.* And so another reverential fear should be the fear of forgetting, forgetting who we were before, who we are now, and what it cost God to redeem us.

But there's something else that we've also forgotten. We have forgotten how fearful God actually is. You see, to live with no fear of God is a terrible thing, and it's a terrible thing because God tells us so in *Romans 3:18*. There God is listing his indictment against mankind and he has all kinds of things against man himself and he sums up his indictment in verse 18 by saying: *There is no fear of God before their eyes.* Well, you can probably imagine this is precisely the spirit of our age. This is exactly where people are today. Now you flip that and you get to the other side of it and it's equally wrong to live our lives consumed with fear about God because that kind of fear doesn't produce worshipers. Instead it produces sycophants and toadies and

bootlickers. I mean the kind of people who gather around the schoolyard bully in order to cheer him on. And if any of you have ever read any of the new atheists such as Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens or Sam Harris, they've all written bestsellers claiming that's just who the Christian God is. He's a cosmic schoolyard bully. And they see their position as brave and noble because they see God for the bully that he really is. And they're brave enough to be willing to shake their fist in his face. And they claim that we Christians are simply cowards who side with the biggest and scariest bully because we think it's in our best interest. Well, one point of their criticism is true. As Tim Keller puts it, God is very, very big and he is very, very scary. The Bible makes that clear. When God came down to Mount Sinai, understand what happened, the entire mountain shook. Just picture a long earthquake but it's not actually breaking down. So the mountain is shaking and smoke begins to billow and a trumpet sounds and it gets louder and louder and louder until it's producing absolute terror. This is *Exodus 19*, this is what God said: *On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightening, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke*

*from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up.*

This is a God who is very big and very scary. And about the closest that we can get to the physical sense of that today is a hurricane. You know, I once read a description of some folks who foolishly stayed behind when they should have evacuated. They gave an eye witness account of a couple who stayed, and they talked about the winds shrieking beyond their wildest imagination and buildings groaning as if they were going to leave the earth any instant followed by the sudden violence of things smashing and the absolute terror that it produced, and that was just a hurricane. I mean, that's something that's gone in a matter of hours. God is far scarier than a hurricane. Jesus himself said in *Luke 12*: "*I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: Fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!*" Jesus is saying fear my Father. And you know, Jesus could be terribly scary as well. I mean when he cowed a storm into submission, he terrified his disciples. *Mark 4* says this: *And a great windstorm arose, and the*

waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. See, when the disciples actually saw the sheer raw power that emanated from Christ's fingertips, they were terrified. They weren't terrified of the storm, they were terrified of Jesus. In verse 40: He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" See, Jesus is worthy of reverential fear because Jesus is God. And here's the part that I think we miss. When Jesus said in John 10:30: "I and the Father are one," he wasn't speaking hyperbole and he wasn't speaking about some distant God way, way off in the Old Testament. You see, this Jesus is the very same God who descended on Mount Sinai terrifying the Jews. And we pushed the scary aspect of our God out of our consciousness. And Dawkins and Harris and Hitchens, well, they all tell us this is the God you Christians worship, and he's nothing but a bully. I mean, they point to scripture and accuse God. So what can we say? Well, in Exodus 33 Moses goes up to the mountain to see God. In verse 18 he asks God if he can see his glory. Exodus 33 says this: *Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause*

*all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."* How scary is a God whose full presence will actually kill you even if he is pleased with you as he was pleased with Moses?

You know, Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6, he's watching as the ark of the covenant is being carried on an oxcart and he knows that God's presence is in that ark and the ox stumble at a stream bed. The cart begins to tip. The ark begins to fall. Uzzah sees it and he reaches out his hand to steady it. God strikes him dead instantly. 2 Samuel 6, it says: *The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act, therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.* Why did God do that? What does Jesus have to do with that? You know, some folks love to draw a big fat borderline between the Old and the New Testaments and they look at the God of the Old Testament, God the Father, he's the mean one, the nasty one. He's the primitive God who will smite you if you look at him sideways. And then in the New Testament we have Jesus the Son. He's the kind one. He's the caring one. He's the forgiving God who doesn't much care about petty things such as sin. They forget Jesus's words: *"I and the Father are one."* Jesus is

just as responsible as the Father and the Holy Spirit for executing Uzzah on the spot. The Godhead may have different roles but they're all one in the same God. Jesus brings glory to God by demonstrating the Father's compassion and love. The Father brings glory to himself by demonstrating his absolute holiness. The Spirit brings glory to God by opening up our hearts and minds to the entire Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But make no mistake about it, the Father's holiness was the Son's holiness was the Spirit's holiness as well. But Uzzah was only trying to keep the ark from hitting the mud. It was R.C. Sproul who said Uzzah forgot that mud would never defile the ark. But we would. He had forgotten that God was holy, perfect, and absolutely unapproachable by sinful man. There was but one way to approach a holy God. Once a year on the day of atonement the high priest would come with an offering into the holy place and there separating him from the Holy of Holies was a curtain some 30 feet high and almost three-quarters of an inch thick. Well, the high priest's task was to bring a sacrifice on behalf of the people before a holy God, and everything about that place in that curtain shouted that a holy God was offended by sin and that the blood of a sacrificed animal could only temporarily assuage his wrath. That curtain that was there in front of him said: "Your sin has separated you from your God." You know, if you get near the Fukushima reactor in Japan, the thing that melted down, you're going to be dead in very short order. Get

near to the holiness of God unprotected by the blood of his Son and that radioactivity will seem like a mild sunburn. *Hebrews 10:31* says: *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

And so we ask, well maybe the neo-atheists are on to something. Is God really a cosmic bully? Well, make no mistake about it, God in and of his very nature is awful in the original sense, that is his very presence is filled with awe. Some folks do follow him only because they fear him. They follow him 'cause they fear he's going to crush them otherwise. But that's not worship. And Tim Keller again points out two main reasons why people worship God. Some do it because God is very, very big and he's very, very scary and it's best to be on his good side. They worship God because he's useful. Others simply worship God because they see that he's altogether lovely. How do they see that? I mean, how do we start out seeking a useful God who's going to protect us from poverty and sickness and misfortune and from his wrath itself and then end up worshipping the real God simply because he's so lovely? Well, Peter gives us the answer. It's in our text this morning. It's *the precious blood of Christ. A lamb without spot or blemish.* It's why our praise should always be directed at the blood of Christ. You see, God is very, very big and he is very, very scary. But big scary bullies don't shed that blood for their enemies. Big scary bullies

don't allow themselves to be despised and rejected and stricken and smitten and afflicted and pierced and crushed just so that we could be redeemed. Big scary bullies don't allow mere men to strip them, to mock them and to nail them to a cross to pay the ultimate price of justice for our sin. When Jesus Christ was crucified, virtually no one saw him as scary in the least. But he was. See, he had given up, he had put away his scariness for us. *Philippians 2:6* says of Jesus: *Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death -- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.* Jesus was in very nature God. The very same God who struck down Uzzah in the Old Testament is eating and drinking with harlots and tax collectors in the New Testament. And until you see the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in every aspect of Christ, you will never begin to understand the depths of what he did for us.

The 19th chapter of the gospel of John says: *Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple*

robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face. This is the very same God whose presence shook Mount Sinai, who warned Moses keep your distance or you die, who executed Uzzah on the spot for forgetting he was holy. Now it is he, the very same God who is naked and bleeding, mocked with a purple robe, wiping Romans' spit off his face. Do you see why it's the blood that makes God so lovely? The blood that ran through the veins of Jesus was unlike any other blood that's ever been on planet earth. It was absolutely flawless. Adam and Eve were flawless for a time but they fell. Jesus came to the cross having been fully tried and tested and yet with his blood untainted by sin. It represented his perfection and it represented his death, and it was without question the most precious liquid the universe has ever known, but look what became of it. You know, in all likelihood that blood started to drip down his face as the crown of thorns was pressed into his scalp. We know that our scalps bleed very freely, and so that crown probably produced an ample flow of blood just dripping down his face. It dripped down his face and then it splattered as the King and Creator of the universe was being flogged and bits of bone and metal were ripping into his flesh. In all likelihood that blood then gushed from the nails as they found the veins and the arteries in his hands and his feet and as he was hoisted up on the cross, most of that blood just dripped into the dirt surrounding the

cross. Big scary bullies don't let that happen. Uzzah was executed on the spot for trying to protect the ark of God from being defiled by the dirt. His motives were good but his actions were foolish and he paid for that with his life. And here at the cross, all motives are evil and all actions are doubly so. And yet God the Father, the one that is so often accused of being heartless and unforgiving can only watch in agony as his Son's blood drips and drops into the dirt below him. Just picture your own son in the hands of torturers and you being all powerful and able to stop it at any moment but constrained by the will of the trinity to pay the price of our sin. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had all agreed before time had even begun on the necessity of the cross, and please, please don't ever think of Jesus as a victim. He willingly went. He orchestrated his own sacrifice. Instead I picture all of the power in God's right hand held by all the power in his left hand just to restrain him so that justice and mercy can be served. God the Father and God the Spirit withhold their awesome power as God the Son by his agreement is being tortured and executed in our place. Now does that God strike you as a bully? Big scary bullies don't let little scary bullies murder their sons. But God the Father did. And big scary bullies don't voluntarily extend their hands and feet so that Roman soldiers can pound nails through flesh. Big scary bullies don't have their blood splattered and sprinkled just like the blood of the sacrificed lambs. You see,

the cross fulfilled what the animal sacrifices pointed to for thousands of years, that Jesus would become the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus alone would end that separation between man and God. *Luke 23* says: *It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."* When he had said this, he breathed his last. You see, that curtain torn in two proved that man and God were no longer separated. The biggest, the scariest power the world has ever known had given up that power and his life to ransom and rescue us. Our penalty has now been paid. And if God wasn't so big and he wasn't so scary, then the cross would not have been so great a sacrifice. And herein lies the cure to an empty life that Peter is speaking of. Please listen carefully to what I'm saying. The more precious the blood of Christ is to you, the more you will fulfill your purpose, which is praise and glory, the more fulfilled your life will be. The less precious the blood of Christ is to you, the less you will be given to praise, the less you will fulfill your purpose, and the more empty your life will be. You see, the fact is thousands and thousands faced an awful death on the cross. Only one was the creator and the sustainer of the universe. Only one willingly allowed a puny sin-filled creation to willingly slaughter its

creator. Why? *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* You know what Peter wants? Peter wants us to be awestruck, just astounded that God would bleed and die for his own. This is what he says. He says: *Therefore, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

My question for us this morning is who do you think of when you think of God? I mean do you wonder is he big? Is he scary? Can he crush me? Can I keep him happy? Well, you're probably looking at a God who has become useful. It is only when you look at the precious blood of the Lamb without spot or wrinkle that you begin to see a God who is not merely useful but altogether lovely. This is the God that we center our lives on. This is the God who gives our lives purpose, the God whose glory fills our otherwise empty lives, whose loveliness is seen in the blood that he shed for us. So we ask, okay, do you fear this God? Absolutely. I mean we fear his grandeur like we fear the oceans and the mountaintops and hurricanes. We fear his impartial judgment knowing as believers we are not fearful of the punishment that Christ has already borne for

us but that instead we fear having spent all of our time here on earth with almost nothing to show for in eternity if we don't get the blood of Christ. We fear disobedience to God because we are chosen as children of obedience by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to the Son. So we fear disobeying God like we would fear an earthly father that we love and respect. And finally we fear forgetting. Forgetting who we were before and who we are now and just what it cost God to redeem us. We fear forgetting to be awestruck at the grace of God that Paul sums up for us in *Romans 5*, he says this, he says: *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* It is an empty life that can be summed up in a beer commercial. A full life rests on a historical fact: God himself became one of us, he lived a perfect life and then he died so that we could share in his perfection and give our lives the ultimate purpose by living to glorify Him. And folks, it doesn't get any better than that. Let's pray.

*Father, I just thank you for the precious blood of Christ. The Lamb without spot, the Lamb without blemish. Lord, I thank you so much for the mighty power that you are. I thank you for putting*

*away your scariness to become one of us. I thank you for the absolute powerlessness you experienced at the cross, the ultimate power reduced to absolute powerless for our sins. Thank you for that, Lord. Give us the ability, give us the fear of forgetting, that keeps us ever present of the fact that it is your blood that makes all the difference. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*